The Prince of Light Part 2

It was a short journey to the other side, and the brothers stood side by side on the highest deck, watching the land they were heading to coming slowly closer. Cam gripped the wood of the ship before him as he leant forward, glaring ahead with a fierce determination, his brother standing a step behind him.
I will find you…Lucy……I will see you again. He narrowed his eyes. *Wait for me…*
But it was before they reached the land, that they received the news.
Wonderland came back to them, appearing out of thin air beside them. Cam's stomach clenched at upon sight of her, as he grew scared, fearing bad news. But then she smiled.
'Lucy has been found!' Wonderland beamed. 'She is alive and well.'
Cam stifled a sob, hand going to his mouth in relief.
'Oh, thank the gods…' he uttered.
'Come with us' Wonderland said to him then. 'It is time. We will help to make you strong.'
Cam blinked, feeling his heart stop in his chest.
He straightened, lowering his hand from his mouth.
'What' Cam breathed. 'I don't get to see her?'
'You want to be strong don't you?' Wonderland said to him. 'Do you want to return to her now, or as something better?'
'I…I want to see her.'
'Don't you trust us?' Wonderland asked him in an accusing tone. 'After everything we've done for you?'
Cam bowed his head.
'You've done many things for me, many things to me. Not all of them good.'
'Say your farewells to your brother' Wonderland said backing away. 'We will leave this world together, you and I Cam. You have only minutes.'
She drifted away, but she did not vanish entirely. Wonderland only wandered to the other side of the ship, to stand and stare out at the sea on the other side. From this distance she would still be able to hear what the brothers said.
Cam turned to Luke, who looked back at him sadly.
'Well…' Luke began slowly, speaking with great reluctance, 'I guess this is it then.'
'You'll go on ahead won't you?' Cam urged him. 'You'll keep going…to find Lucy yourself…and tell her what has happened to me.'
'I will' Luke whispered, tears brimming in his eyes. 'I promise I will.'
They embraced each other, holding one another tight.
'You'll come back' Luke said to him. 'You *will* come back won't you?'
'Yes' Cam whispered, fighting back his own tears. 'I promise. I swear to the gods…I will…'

Wonderland held out her arm, inviting Cam to move forwards. Once he did, Wonderland summoned a portal, using her magic with ease, to create a doorway to another world.
'Are you ready?' Wonderland whispered excitedly to him.

Cam glanced at her hesitantly, before looking back at his brother. Luke gazed back at him from a short distance away, nodding once slowly in encouragement.
Cam faced ahead again, staring at the portal reluctantly for a brief moment, before taking a breath and stepping towards it.
He stood directly before it, squinting at the bright light as it shone in his eyes.
He turned back to face his brother, just one last time.
'This is it' Cam said.
'This is it' Luke echoed, his voice unhappy.
'I will return one day' Cam told him. 'I promise I will come home.'
'I know you will' Luke nodded slowly.
Cam turned away to face the blinding light again.
He took one last steady breath to calm his nerves, before stepping forwards, through the portal, and to places unknown.

The next time Cam opened his eyes, he was in another world.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

It was a shock. The first thing that hit his senses was the noise and the bright lights all around him.
He was in the middle of the busy road, with cars driving fast in both directions.
Cam stumbled backwards as one skidded to a stop, heading straight for him. The driver behind the wheel honked his horn angrily as Cam backed away further in fear, eyes wide and heart beating painfully inside his ribcage.
Everything around him was so strange; his brain couldn't comprehend what he was seeing, everything he was hearing, even the atmosphere felt different.
Cam turned away from the vehicle and the angry driver before him, jogging across the road into the path of several other oncoming vehicles which skidded and swerved to avoid him. Cam stumbled to the side as one of them nearly hit him, but he didn't stop running, not until he had reached the pavement where the cars did not drive.
Cam hunched his body over, gasping and panting in shock as he leant forwards with his hands resting on his knees, arms trembling violently.

He straightened up slowly, lifting his head to see the many people around him staring at him. Cam swallowed the lump in his throat as a few of them pointed, speaking behind their hands of how strange he was, and of the clothes that he wore, which to them seemed so out of place. A few quickly moved on, continuing on with their business, while others lingered.

Cam gritted his teeth, glancing about briefly before making his way slowly along the pavement in a random direction, his eyes wide and roving all around him as he continued to sweat and tremble.

What is this place……?

There were tall great grey buildings all around him, reaching almost to the sky it seemed, with so many windows running along every side, and people, so many people. Even here on the ground Cam could see people through the windows of these building, people who appeared to be very busy doing who knows what.

It was a noisy world, so loud and bright and strange, with so many people, and the cars…

Cam slowed to a stop as he saw one parked beside him, there was no person inside this one.

His eyes travelled down, and he saw the car tyre clearly, and a memory came to him then.

'I've seen this before…' he mumbled to himself.

Auntie…

He reached out to touch it, feeling it with his thumb and forefinger.

'It feels just like I remember' he whispered.

He drew his hand back then, glancing about him again, realising that people were beginning to stare at him once more. Cam moved swiftly away from the car, heading onwards in no direction in particular.

I have to act normal in this world…I have to fit in…. or at least try…

Though it was clear as day that Cam did not belong here, and as he gazed at the people all around him, he saw how different they were, how strange they were to *him*, the way they spoke, the way they dressed. Cam wondered for a moment if magic existed in this world. It did not in his own.

People still gave him strange looks as he went by, some even made an effort to get out of his way, giving him a wide birth, perhaps thinking that there was something wrong with him.

None could possibly have imagined the true story however; that this man was from another world entirely.

Cam slowed to a stop, coming to a quieter area. He had moved away from the crowd and the noise, coming to the side of a shop in a quiet street, leaning back against the wall and holding himself.

Cam remained where he was for the longest time, simply clinging to the wall behind him, a sudden wave of nausea washing over him, he began to feel sick, hand quickly going to his mouth as he fought hard against the urge to throw up.

Is this the strange place you intended to take me to? If so…why am I here alone…without guidance…?

He tensed, as his gag reflex fought against him. When this feeling began to subside, he lowered his hand, drawing a steady breath.

What is the purpose of this? Where are you? You were supposed to help me!

Cam lifted his head again, looking around him once more at this bright and busy world.

He was in a city, the pavement he could see a short distance from him was crowded with people, walking and talking loudly and waiting at traffic lights, and on the roads before him, the traffic moved swiftly.
Cam pushed himself off the wall tentatively, walking very slowly down this quieter pavement and maintaining his distance from the other people around him as he went.
After a time, he slowed to a stop, turning to the side to gaze through the shop window. Inside the window in display cases, were cameras and TV's and all manner of electrical equipment. Cam of course, could not comprehend what these where.
He saw suddenly an image of himself then. It was not a mirror, but the camera on top of the flat screen TV which recorded him and his every move.
Cam leant forward slowly towards the glass, frowning furiously as his mind desperately tried to process what he was seeing. He lifted his hand, waving it once across his face. The image in the TV did the same.
He lowered his hand slowly, eyes wide staring back at himself.

Cam explored this world for the longest time, becoming as familiar with it as he could.
It wasn't long before he began to grow concerned, as he wondered where the masked figures were, why they had brought him here, and if they would return to him.
I have seen none of them Cam worried as he sat on a park bench in a quieter part of the city, leaning forwards on his knees and listening to his stomach growling. *Where are they? Why have they just left me here like this?*
It had grown late now; the sun had set, taking with it its warm light.
Cam began to shiver slightly as the chill began to set in, he watched from his seat alone as the sky changed from bleeding red to purple to dark blue.
It was not totally dark yet, a few of the suns old light could still be seen clinging to the edges of the city, though the stars overhead shone brightly.
It was bright in the city, and as the day wore on and died and darkness crept closer, the city grew brighter still, with its many lights. It was lit here in the park also, but the street lamps

were fewer and far between, and though there were still people that could be seen from where he sat, they were far fewer in number now than earlier that day.

People rest at night here it seems Cam thought vaguely to himself as he watched the few figures in the distance moving through the park, sticking to the paths as they went. *They have that at least in common with my own world…*

Cam tensed suddenly, hearing a slight noise behind him, though it was faint. He glanced around, seeing a figure approaching him through the shadows from behind. Cam watched. He did not get a clear look at the figure until the figure stepped out into the pool of light from the streetlight which hung directly above the bench where Cam sat.

Cam stared at the figure that stood directly before him now.

It was a man, who looked to be young, only in his early twenties, dressed in the same sort of clothes Cam had seen so many other people around him wearing that day.

The stranger smiled at him, in a gesture that Cam thought might have been kind.

Cam straightened up slightly, beginning to feel a little nervous.

The man cocked his head slightly as if considering him, for a long time not even speaking.

Cam's skin began to prickle as he stared back at the stranger uncertainly, and he scratched at his palms nervously as he began to sweat, never taking his eyes off the man.

'Hello' the man spoke at last, doing so with confidence.

'H-hello' Cam fumbled back.

'What are you doing out here on your own?'

Cam clenched his teeth, glancing either side of him before looking back up at the stranger before him.

'I don't know' he answered at last.

'Are you lost?' the stranger offered.

Cam hesitated.

'Yes…. I think so…. I mean….' he swallowed the lump in his throat. 'I've never been here before' he finished. 'I don't know where I am.'

'I can help you.'

'How?' Cam asked anxiously.

'I live with my sister' the stranger replied. 'We've seen our fair share of strangers come and go through this city. It's a big place, there's lots of travellers, and we help them. This is such a large place after all' he smiled, 'it's so easy to get lost.'

Cam blinked up at him.

'Come on' the man said encouragingly, smiling warmly in a gesture that seemed to be genuine. 'I can help you. My sister can help you. Just come with me.'

Cam hesitated again, looking away and scanning the park around him for a masked figure. There was none.

He looked back at the man.

'Alright' Cam breathed. 'I'll come with you.'

'Great' the stranger said happily, taking a step back as Cam rose to his feet. 'My name is Nathan by the way' he told Cam, turning away as he began to walk.

'I'm Cam.'

Nathan gave a nod, before facing forwards and continuing to walk.

Cam hurried after him, following in his footsteps silently as they headed back towards the busier parts of the city and away from the silent park, Cam always remaining immediately behind the man.
He followed Nathan, watching as he stopped at the edge of one of the roads, pressing a button against a lamppost and waiting for the man to turn green, which it did several seconds later.
Cam was surprised to see the cars stop for them, and he hurried after Nathan as he crossed the road, fearing the cars would begin to move again. But they didn't, and Nathan seemed completely calm.
Why wouldn't he be? Cam thought to himself. *This is his world after all.*
He followed Nathan in silence for a while, moving slowly through the streets until they veered off in one direction and into a quiet alley.
Cam glanced behind him as they left the open roads behind them, continuing after Nathan until they rounded another corner, and the road was cut off from view altogether.
Nathan stopped then, turning back to face Cam who watched him expectantly.
'What are you doing?' Cam asked uncertainly, as Nathan stepped closer to him and pulled the neck of his shirt down, exposing his shoulder.
Nathan didn't answer. His eyes flickered only briefly to Cam's face, before he leant forwards, lips hovering over Cam's skin.
Cam leant back away from him, drawing a slow breath as his eyes widened. His feet felt as if they were suddenly frozen to the ground. He was unable to move out of fear.
Cam could feel Nathan's breath upon him briefly, before Nathan opened his jaws and sunk his teeth into his flesh.

Cam's heart stopped in his chest. Instantly his mind was a whirl of confusion and pain as he was gripped by a sudden sense of unreality at the strangeness of the situation, as he slowly began to comprehend what had just happened.
Cam raised his arms, grasping Nathan's shoulders to try to fend him off, but his grip was weak. Nathan still not letting go of him, pushed Cam back, pressing his own body against Cam's and trapping him against the wall.
Cam moaned in pain. His arms fell to his side as the weakness spread through is body.
'What have you done….?' Cam gasped in horror. 'What have you done to me……?'
Nathan took a step away, wiping Cam's blood from his mouth.
He smirked.
'That's not all I'm going to do to you' Nathan whispered dangerously.
Cam tried to speak but was unable, gasping in shock, his knees suddenly buckled and he collapsed.
Cam pushed himself up, staring in shock at his legs. He hit himself, realising there was no feeling there at all.
'What have you done to me?!' Cam demanded, beginning to panic.
Nathan didn't answer; he only glanced one way down the alley, and then the other, before facing Cam again.
He was waiting, Cam realised with growing dread. Simply waiting.

Cam began to crawl desperately away, but he realised how futile his efforts were when his arms began to go numb too.
He sat himself up, slumping against the wall behind him and staring hopelessly up at Nathan, feeling the poison coursing through his body.
And that was when his skin began to change. His whole body began to glow, and he shone brighter in the dark of the night.
Nathan took a step back in shock and surprise, eyes wide as he drew sharply away.
'What are you?' he uttered as he narrowed his eyes.
Cam stared silently up at him, wondering what the man would do next, unable to control the magic within him as it took over.
Clearly it was a dangerous world for the stranger, and anything out of the ordinary was best left alone.
Nathan took another step back, and then another. He turned on his heel and strode away, acting as if nothing had happened. Nathan just left him there, and returned to the streets, slipping out of sight, perhaps to search for another victim.
Cam turned his head to the side to watch him go, his breath coming in wheezes now.
'Don't worry' spoke an unfamiliar voice, 'he won't be back.'
Cam looked the other way, lifting his eyes blearily up to see a figure all in black, hooded and cloaked and wearing a plague mask.
'First lesson you should already know' the figure continued, 'be careful who you trust.'
'What's happening to me?' Cam whispered, his head spinning.
'You've been bitten by a ghoul' the masked figure explained.
'A ghoul?'
'They feed on human flesh' the figure continued. 'Their bite…I don't know if you could call it venom as such…it weakens their victim so that the kill is easier. Once you're bitten by a ghoul…you're lucky to survive and come out alive.'
'What is this world?' Cam breathed.
'You can call it…' he pondered for a moment. 'Bloodsin.'
'Bloodsin?' Cam repeated, speaking feebly.
'It's the name given to the act of a ghoul turning you into one of their own.'
Cam's hand went automatically to his shoulder where he had been bitten. 'Will that happen to me?' he asked with worry.
'No' the masked figure replied. 'Not unless you've had sex with him.'
Cam blinked slowly.
'That's the only way for a human to turn ghoul' the masked figure continued, 'and only male ghouls can turn others. You're perfectly safe.'
'Bloodsin's not the real name of this world is it' Cam said flatly, knowing the answer as he let his arm drop to his side.
'It's the only name you need to know of' the masked figure answered calmly. 'Now if you excuse me...'
The masked figure slipped away without further explanation, vanishing into the darkness.
Cam didn't try to stop him as he left. He wanted little to do with those masked figures right now. He didn't need nor want them at this time. There was so much going on around him, so much he needed to adjust to, he felt that he just needed to clear his mind.

He bowed his head, sitting slumped on the ground with his arms resting limply by his side. His whole body filled with pins and needles, he sat there feeling extremely uncomfortable for several minutes, until the sensation slowly began to ebb away.
Cam twitched his fingers; he clenched his fist, before relaxing again. He moved his foot, slowly bringing his knees up.
Cam used the wall behind him as support as he pushed himself to his feet tentatively, wobbling and moving gingerly.
He leant against the building behind him, taking slow and steady breaths. He ran his hands over his body, feeling himself, gripping his skin here and there, until his touch came to his shoulder.
The ghoul had bitten him hard; the cut in his flesh was deep. Cam touched it tenderly with his fingertips.
It was very painful.
Cam pulled his shirt back up, covering the wound again.
He straightened, moving further into the alley and away from the sound of traffic nearby, which he could still faintly hear. His body began to darken as the glow ebbed away, his skin, hair and clothes returning to their normal colour once again, as he made his way onwards.
Cam left the alley, stepping out onto the streets once more on the other side. He moved along the pavement, keeping his head down as he walked amongst the people, heading in no particular direction. He walked for nearly half an hour or so, before coming to a park bench in another part of the city and sitting down.
He stared at his feet for some time, feeling hunger so strong inside him now that is physically hurt.
He lay down on his side, closing his eyes and falling asleep on the bench.

Cam woke some hours later, just as the sun had touched the edge of the horizon. It would not be seen within the city however for many hours yet, as the building here were so tall and so many.
Cam rolled onto his back, his body aching all over as he had lain for so long on the hard bench.
He stared up at the morning sky above him, resting with his hand upon his forehead.
The clouds drifted slowly by, though around him there was very little breeze.
Suddenly a face appeared leaning over him. Cam's eyes slowly widened as recognition dawned on him.
He scrambled to get away, falling off the bench as he did so.
'Morning!'
'Keep away from me' Cam ordered, with no conviction in his voice.
'Relax' Nathan replied casually as he leant on the bench. 'I've fed already. I'm not going to eat you.'
Cam rose gingerly to his feet, never taking his eyes away from the ghoul before him, as he smiled innocently back at him.

Hi!' Nathan waved.
'What do you want?'
'I saw you lying here' Nathan explained. 'I thought I'd see if you were alright.'
'Why?'
'Hey. I'm not a bad person' Nathan said defensively. 'I can't help being born this way. I need human flesh and blood to survive. That doesn't make me evil…though some would disagree' he added as an afterthought.
Cam narrowed his eyes suspiciously.
'My group has taken a special interest in you' Nathan said, getting straight to the point. 'We'd like you to join us.'
'Get away from me' Cam snapped at him. 'I don't want anything to do with you.'
'Oh, come on' Nathan said. 'There's no need to be like that.'
'*No'* Cam said shaking his head and backing away. 'You're going to hurt me again! You're going to trick me.'
'I assure you' Nathan spoke patiently, 'you're wrong.'
But Cam was having none of it. He turned tailed and ran, heading away, anywhere away from Nathan.
Cam slowed to a stop, panting as he reached the other side of the street, turning and glancing back to the other side of the road where he saw Nathan, still standing where he was by the bench and waving merrily at him. But he did not pursue Cam.
Cam moved away, heading down the street and deeper into the city, soon losing sight of the bench and the park entirely. He walked alone, heading in no particular direction, and feeling terribly hungry still.
Time began to wear on, and as the sun climbed higher in the sky, the city was slowly coming to life.
As Cam continued onwards, he looked all about him, moving sluggishly as he did so.
There was so much to take in, in this congested world. The streets he walked quickly became crowded; the road beside him busy with cars, constantly driving in both directions.
Cam paused for a moment, standing on the edge of the road and watching the cars. They were strange things to him, never having seen anything even close to one before. He stared at one of the cars as it slowed before him, suddenly stopping. Cam heard music coming from inside the car, music of the sort he had never heard before.
He wondered for a moment why the car beside him had stopped, then suddenly noticed a red light displayed above the road before the car. The light changed from red, to orange, to green, and the car took off again, driving slowly as it went away, followed by a line of other cars that drove behind.
Cam stepped back from the road, walking along the street again, walking slowly as he meandered through the crowd. His attention lingered on the many shops that were around him, selling all sorts of things. Cam paused before a tattoo shop, staring closely at the pictures displayed in the windows. He moved aside then as a man opened the door of the shop and stepped out. The man had tattoos that covered both of his arms in extensive designs. He gave Cam a strange look, before moving on.
Cam watched the man for a brief time, before glancing back to the shop window, seeing his reflection in the glass. He turned and walked away.

He wandered the streets for hours, feeling utterly lost, and ravenously hungry.
After a while he decided to rest. He sat now at a small round table before a café, watching the other customers come and go. There were chairs and tables inside, but just as many outside too, separated from the rest of the street by a thin and basic barrier. It was a pleasant enough place for Cam, he had nowhere else to go.
He stayed here for hours, until he was approached by the waitress.
'Are you alright sir?' she asked him kindly. 'Is there anything I can help you with?'
Cam looked up at her. She was a pretty, young woman with a beautiful smile.
'I…' Cam began.
'You look a little lost' she said.
'Yes' Cam mumbled. 'I suppose I am.'
'I've finished my shift' she told him. 'Would you like to come with me? I'd like to walk with you.'
Cam was instantly uncertain at the request, but eventually agreed on her insistence to go with her, for he had nowhere else to be.
He walked with this strange woman through the streets.
'Where are we going?' he asked after a time.
'My name is Tracy by the way' she said to him smiling kindly. 'And we're going home.'
'Why would you want me to go home with you?' Cam asked her. 'You don't know me.'
Tracy hesitated then. 'I know a person in need when I see one' she replied at last. 'You don't have a home do you.'
It wasn't phrased like a question. She knew.
'No' Cam answered anyway. 'My home is a long way away; I am unable to get there…as much as I didn't want to leave…'
'Your clothes' Tracy said, 'they look like they come from a different time. You stand out a little I must say.'
'Yeah' Cam grumbled miserably. 'I guess I do…'
She watched him closely, just staring at him for several seconds as they walked, as if thinking thoughts she would never speak. But then she turned away, as if shrugging off these thoughts.
'I'm hungry' she said. 'But you must be hungrier. Come on. It's not far now.'
He followed her to the edge of the city and to an apartment complex, ascending several flights of stairs before reaching one of the higher floors.
Tracy came to one of the doors and opened without knocking or unlocking the door. Cam followed uncertainly after her, and she closed the door behind him.
The first thing that Cam saw when he stepped into the apartment, was Nathan.
'Hi there!' he beamed.
Cam instantly paled, turning to Tracy, his expression one of shock and disbelief.
'He's been watching you for hours' Tracy explained simply. 'He told me to bring you here.'
'You tricked me' Cam uttered.
'We're trying to help you' Nathan reasoned. 'Why else would we go through all this trouble?'
'Maybe you still want to kill me' Cam said, raising his voice now. 'Maybe…'
He cut off suddenly, hearing the sound of a baby crying.

‘You woke her up’ Nathan said angrily as Tracy moved away and into the next room, returning seconds later with the baby in her arms.
‘You're a family?’ Cam uttered.
Nathan frowned at him in irritation.
‘Is that your son?’ Cam asked him.
‘No’ Nathan said, moving away from him and towards Tracy, bowing his head as he touched the baby, brushing the child’s hair back tenderly. ‘Her father was killed’ he said. ‘I am helping Tracy care for her.’ He raised his head back to Cam again. ‘Her father was my brother.’
‘How did he die?’ Cam asked tentatively.
‘He was murdered’ Nathan replied, ‘by another ghoul.’
Cam’s attention went back to Tracy then. ‘You're a ghoul too?’
‘Yeah’ she said.
But even as she spoke these words, Cam did not fear her.
He took a step forwards, getting a closer look at the baby. He saw with a twinge of fear, that the little girl’s eyes were as black at the night.
‘Our eyes are just like hers’ Nathan told him, sensing his thoughts, ‘but we hide it…to appear *normal*.’ He pursed his lips then, frowning. ‘We are not the monsters you think we are. We are just trying to survive in this world…just like everybody else…’

The baby was calmed and returned to bed once she had settled, Cam lingering in the corner of the room and watched in silence as Tracy leant over the crib, cooing to the child and caressing her cheek.
Cam bowed his head.
‘You must be hungry’ Nathan said to him, and Cam tensed slightly as he was addressed. ‘It’s ok’ Nathan spoke kindly. ‘I'm not going to hurt you…and I'm not trying to trick you either…’
Nathan offered Cam to sit at the table as he prepared some food quickly for him.
Cam did so, feeling so strange and out of place. It was not that long ago he was in his own world, where he was born, where he had spent his entire life, never having left, never even knowing there were other words. And now he was here…. wherever *here* was.
He glanced around him at the modern room, a kitchen which opened out to a living room, a small and modest apartment, with very little in terms of decoration.
Cam was offered the food that Nathan prepared, before he went away to speak to Tracy.
Cam sat at the table silently, watching Nathan and Tracy have a whispered argument in the other room. He could see them, but couldn’t hear what they were saying, but he got the feeling that they were arguing about him.
Cam glanced tentatively down at his food, lifting the fork and beginning to eat slowly.
The food he ate was freshly cooked, vegetables and rice. It tasted good, but Cam ate it slowly as it was so unfamiliar to him.
‘When you asked me to bring him here I didn’t realise you meant for him to stay’ Tracy spoke angrily to Nathan.
Her voice was a little louder now, and Cam was able to hear what she was saying.

‘Well what else did you think?’ Nathan argued.
‘He can’t stay here.’
‘Why not?’
Tracy fell silent for a time, and Cam sat listlessly at the table, fork in hand but not eating his food.
‘What if he hurts her?’ Tracy asked.
‘Why would he do such a thing?’
‘He’s a stranger’ Tracy shot back, irritated now. ‘A foreigner. Who knows what he will do.’
Nathan walked away then, and Cam tensed when he suddenly appeared in the room staring at him.
‘You're not thinking of harming this child in any way are you?’ he asked Cam.
Cam straightened then, blinking at the strange question.
‘N-no’ he said hastily. ‘Why would I?’
‘Good’ Nathan said satisfied. ‘Because if you did do anything to harm her, I *will* kill you and eat you, but not before I've made you regret what you did.’
Cam swallowed nervously. He put his fork down, speaking to Nathan in the most sincere way.
‘I would never ever harm a child’ he said to both of them. ‘That would make me evil, and I am not…I'm a good person…I try to be….’ He turned away.
‘There’ Nathan said glancing back to Tracy, seemingly satisfied.
‘He could be lying’ Tracy said shortly.
‘It’s ok’ Nathan told her. ‘I'm here most of the time to watch the baby anyway. What's going to happen with me around? Are you saying you don’t trust *me*?’
‘Of course I trust you’ Tracy huffed, frowning at him.
‘Hey’ he spoke gently now, grasping her shoulders firmly but gently with both hands. ‘We helped him; he could help us in return.’ He glanced towards Cam again. ‘After all’ he finished, ‘what kind of a world would this be if we didn’t help each other?’

A short time later and Tracy left the home. Nathan and Cam stayed behind. The baby in her room was silent.
‘Where is she going?’ Cam asked Nathan.
‘There is an organisation that feeds us’ Nathan replied. ‘She is going there.’
‘I don’t understand’ Cam said shaking his head.
Nathan sat beside him on the sofa, frowning thoughtfully at him as he wondered where to begin.
He decided to begin with Cam.
‘Where did *you* come from first? I want to know. It’s like you come from a different world…the way you act…it’s like you’ve never seen traffic before…or cars…or a TV.’ His brow furrowed further. ‘And your clothes are unlike anything I've seen before…they're so different....’
‘It’s because…’ Cam began reluctantly. ‘I *do* come from another world…in my world we have none of the thing you have here.’ He glanced up at the TV that was switched on before them. On the screen was a film playing, where there was a young woman, singing a song about ‘letting it go’.

‘My own world it seems is an old world’ Cam continued, ‘…this is a new world…with so many strange things....’
Nathan threw his head back laughing then. Cam watched him uncertainly.
‘That’s a funny story’ Nathan said wiping at his eyes. ‘You're very funny’ he continued as Cam watched him with confusion now. ‘Naah, you're probably from an asylum or something…or a stray. I won’t ask about your family, you probably don’t have any anyway.’
He glanced sideways at him. ‘You're not on the run are you?’
‘I don’t understand.’
‘Is there anyone *in this world*’ he smirked, ‘who is after you?’
‘After me? N-no’ Cam stuttered. ‘At least…I don’t think so…’
‘In any case’ Nathan said, clearly amused as he leant forward and tapped Cam on the forehead, ‘I think I should keep a close eye on you. Perhaps it was just an illusion when I saw you glow’ he said, sitting back again. ‘Or perhaps not…’
‘Yes’ Cam said, watching him out of the corner of his eyes. ‘Perhaps it was…’
Nathan closed his eyes, folding his arms behind his head and stretching out, appearing to be preparing to sleep.
‘I thought you said you wanted me to join your group’ Cam spoke up. ‘Are there more of you?’
Nathan opened his eyes again, his expression turning sombre.
‘There were…’ he said forlorn.
Cam blinked uncertainly.
‘It’s a hard life we live…we ghouls…’ Nathan blinked slowly, and Cam then saw something within him, something familiar to him.
It was grief.
‘There were more’ Nathan continued, ‘but they….’ He bit his lip, sighing. He smiled suddenly, turning away and hiding his face, Cam was sure for a moment he saw tears in his eyes. ‘It doesn’t matter’ Nathan said. ‘It’s just the three of us now.’
He’s lost someone close to him Cam realised as he watched him, *someone close…and recently…*
‘You three?’ Cam echoed. ‘You mean yourself…Tracy and the baby…?’
‘Yeah’ Nathan smiled weakly. ‘Well now there are *four* of us.’
‘You really want me to stay here?’ Cam asked nervously.
‘I don’t know what you are’ Nathan spoke. ‘I know you are not a ghoul…but…I still feel there is something special about you…something different. When you began to glow....’
Nathan broke off, tilting his head at Cam, his dark hair falling across his forehead. ‘I'm sorry about…the bite’ he finished.
Cam bowed his head, staring at his lap, his hand unconsciously going to his shoulder.
‘C-can you tell me…’ Cam began, ‘about this world?’
Nathan smirked at that, leaning forwards with his elbows resting against his knees. ‘Yes’ he answered. ‘Yes. You know what *normal* humans are right?’
‘Uh. Yes?’ Cam replied uncertainly.
‘At least you know that much. Well…what I am…what Tracy is and what her daughter is…we are all ghouls.’
‘And what are ghouls?’

‘Ghouls…’ Nathan echoed, ‘is the word given to evil spirits believed to rob graves and eat dead bodies…or is the word given to a person who has an unhealthy interest in death or disaster.’ He smiled wickedly at Cam, giving him a strange look. He reached for him then, taking Cam’s hand in his own and staring at it, turning Cam’s hand over, looking hard at his flesh, before releasing him again. ‘In this world, ghouls’ Nathan said continuing, ‘is the word given to the creatures that *we* are. We are different from humans. We could eat their food if we tried, and we do at times to appear to be like them. But that food is not enough to keep us alive and healthy. If a ghoul were to live on a human diet alone, they would die of hunger in a few short months. We *need* flesh to survive. We *need* raw human meat and blood…we didn’t choose to be this way…we are born this way…and try our best to simply survive in this world, a world that is not our own. A world that does not want us. We live in a human world…and yet we need them to survive.’

‘Shouldn’t people be scared of you?’ Cam asked him.

‘Some people are’ Nathan replied. ‘Many ghouls do what they can to fit in and appear human, but others embrace who they are, they embrace their ghoul-side. Every human is different; ghouls share the same variation among their kind. Some ghouls have horns, some sharp claws, some sharp teeth, but *all* ghouls have black eyes, some though try to hide this, and force themselves to look like humans to avoid discrimination. They file their teeth down, file their horns down…their nails too.’ Nathan took Cam’s hand again, bringing it to his own head and pressing Cam’s fingers to his skull. Cam felt something there, something course, something hard.

‘What is that?’ Cam asked in shock, drawing his hand back sharply.

‘My horns’ Nathan said. ‘I file them down.’

‘Doesn’t that hurt?’

‘Yeah’ Nathan mumbled, ‘but not as much as it hurts to change my eyes. I have to…inject myself…it only lasts a day or so.’

‘So, what is the organisation?’ Cam asked him.

‘Well, I should start at the beginning. We first appeared about fifty years ago. The first of our kind was originally thought to be a deformity, a human child with a taste for flesh. But since that first case, our numbers have increased until nearly one in every thirty individuals is a ghoul. We used to cling to the shadows, coming out only at night to hunt. But the more of use there were, the harder it was for us to hunt. There were so many of us, we had to be governed. There was originally a lot of tension between ghouls and humans, obviously. They didn’t want us, and we didn’t like sharing a world with *them*…but at the same time…we needed them to survive. The organization solved that problem. Our numbers are controlled by the organization, we are not allowed to have children, and we are not allowed to feed ourselves. They feed us so we don’t have to kill.’

‘So’ Cam began. ‘The child…’

‘Is illegal’ Nathan finished.

He paused.

‘What would happen if the baby was found?’ Cam asked.

‘They would take her away from us’ Nathan answered. ‘We don’t know what would happen after that. Maybe…the worst.’

‘That’s horrible.’

‘It is. It’s a difficult life we ghouls live…many of us are hunted.’
‘Are *you* hunted?’ Cam asked.
‘Yes’ Nathan replied sadly. ‘Tracy has a good life. She is known by the organisation, she is registered. She goes to them when she has to and is given food, like every other ghoul that is registered.’
‘So how do *you* feed yourself?’
‘I hunt’ he told him. ‘It’s illegal. If I am caught…I would go missing, like many before me.’ He sighed. ‘I don’t know what will happen after that…they will probably kill me.’
‘So how come you're not registered?’ Cam asked.
‘I was born illegally’ Nathan told him. ‘Those that are registered by the organisation are given a number and tattooed with this number. I have no such number, and neither does the child.’
‘What is her name?’ Cam asked, realising suddenly that he didn’t know it yet, even though they had spoken of her for a while.
‘She doesn’t have one’ Nathan replied. ‘Tracy is too scared to give her one, in case she is taken away.’
‘Then why did she have the baby in the first place?’
‘It wasn’t exactly planned’ Nathan frowned. ‘She fell in love with my brother, another unregistered ghoul, and…one thing led to another……she has to hide her daughter now. I was the one who told her to get rid of it early on…but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. Even before she was born…Tracy loved her too much for her own good.’ He paused again in thought. ‘My brother died before she was born. My last promise to him was to care for his child. I couldn’t let her die. And now, we both fear for her future…we’ve…destined her to a hard life. When she grows, she will probably live as I do. Being unregistered, she will probably have to hunt on her own, and live a life being hunted because of it…hiding…always hiding.’
Is this why the masked figures brought me to this world? Cam thought suddenly to himself. *Were they trying to teach me something? About these people? About this life?*
‘We don’t want to live a controlled life’ Nathan went on. ‘We want to be free. More than anything’
‘Are there many others like you that are not registered?’
‘There are a few’ Nathan said.
‘What is this organisation called that controls you?’
‘It doesn’t have a proper name. It’s just called *organisation C.*’
Cam sat back.
‘So, what will happen now?’
‘Beats me’ Nathan shrugged. ‘Just do what I do and take every day as it comes.’
The baby began to cry then, waking from her sleep. Nathan rose swiftly and went over to the room. Cam followed him instinctively, not wanting to be alone. He followed Nathan into the baby’s room.
The room inside was small, and the walls were painted a pretty pink, and decorated with pink flower stickers about the place. The crib by the wall was white, with a pink blanket inside and cuddly toy animals within the crib itself.

Cam moved closer to Nathan, watching as Nathan bent down to pick up the baby, holding her close to him and rocking her gently in his arms. He began to sing.
Cam did not recognise the foreign lullaby. It was a beautiful and soothing melody, and Nathan's voice was beautiful as he sung it.
After a few moments, the baby fell silent, closing her eyes.
'She just wants attention' Nathan spoke quietly. 'If she hears voices…she gets upset sometimes when she's alone.' He smiled weakly then. 'I think she's going to be difficult to handle when she gets a little older.'
'So human…' Cam mumbled, staring down at her. Now the baby's eyes were closed, he could not see the strange dark eyes.
Nathan turned to him with a sincere expresison, and Cam went a little red, feeling suddenly unsure of what he had said, fearing it as wrong somehow.
'I love her' Nathan began, 'my brother's daughter…my niece……more than anything in life I want to see her grow and mature. I want to see her life a happy life…more than anything…'
Nathan swallowed the lump in his throat.
'Have you children of your own?'
'No' Cam replied.
'You should' Nathan told him. 'Nothing is more rewarding.' He smiled down at the baby, and as he did, Cam saw the edges of his eyes crinkle in joy. 'I want to give her a name…' he said, 'one day…she will have one…my dear niece…' he held her gently closer, resting his forehead against hers before carefully laying her back down to rest.
The nameless child shifted slightly, Nathan comforted the baby one last time, letting her know he was there, before moving his hand away.
'Come on' Nathan whispered. 'Let's leave her to rest.'
They left the room, and Nathan closed the door quietly behind them.
'You can sleep here' Nathan said indicating the sofa as he drifted across the room, heading to the cupboards and pulling out a blanket and some pillows.
He wandered back, dumping them on the sofa.
'Anything else you need?'
'I don't know…I don't think so' Cam answered.
'Good.'
Nathan turned to the window beside them, staring out at the darkening sky. The stars could not be seen, only the gentle orange glow of the streetlights beyond.
'You can stay with us now' Nathan spoke in a distant voice. 'We'll look after you, as long as you look after us.'
'Yes' Cam spoke a little breathlessly. 'I will.'
Nathan regarded him, wearing a slight frown, his hand resting upon his hip.
'It's getting late' he said. 'You should try to sleep.'
'When will Tracy be back?'
'A little later' Nathan answered, his voice seemed loud in the quiet room. 'I'll be in the next room if you need me' he said, moving away towards the door. Beyond the room was dark.
Nathan paused in the doorway, hand upon the frame, he spoke back to Cam one last time. 'Stay out of the baby's room' he told him, 'and don't touch her. Ever. I am a light sleeper.'

He turned away before Cam could respond, switching the main lights off in the room as he went. Cam was left alone in the dark. The only light now coming from the street outside as the room was radiated by the faint orange glow.
He was alone in the strange room, this unfamiliar environment, in this strange world.
Cam drew a steady breath, trying to calm his fears and uncertainties.
He moved over to the sofa, taking off his shoes and lying down, pulling the blankets over him.
He lay there, staring at the room all around him, it still seemed so strange to him. Even now he hardly believed everything that had happened to him recently. His mind couldn't process it. He thought instead of what he knew, and what was familiar to him.
Luke… he thought, before drifting off to sleep. *Where are you now…?*

Cam woke the next morning early. The morning sunlight was only just creeping into the room from outside, its direct rays blocked by the other taller buildings all around the apartment complex.
Cam sat up quickly, immediately seeing something out of place in the room.
Upon the low coffee table before the sofa on which he had slept, were a few items that had not been there before.
Cam leant forward, picking up the little piece of card placed upon the items and reading the note that was written there.

A gift from your friends in black

'Friends…' Cam scoffed. 'Is that what they call themselves?'
He put the card down, reaching for the items upon the table and examining them.
There were clothes and a toothbrush. Cam rose to his feet, studying the clothes, a pair of jeans and several shirts.
He dressed himself hastily; a short while later Tracy emerged from the other room.
'You're awake I see' she noted.
Cam started a little, tensing slightly.
'I-I didn't hear you come in last night' he fumbled.
'You're a heavy sleeper' she grinned.
'D-did you get what you wanted? From the organisation I mean?' Cam said, quickly trying to change the subject and feeling a little awkward.
'I did.'
Cam felt a twinge of nervousness then as he gazed at the woman before him, realising and remembering that she fed on human flesh and blood.

‘Nathan told you all about the organisation then did he?’
‘Y-yes.’
‘And how did you sleep?’ she asked him. ‘It must have been odd for you being in an unfamiliar environment.’
‘It was…I mean…I slept good-well! I mean I slept well.’ He groaned at himself, and his own clumsiness. ‘I slept well enough’ he replied hesitantly, speaking quietly this time. ‘Thank you for your kindness…I don’t know what I would have done without…’
He trailed off.
‘New clothes?’ Tracy asked him then.
‘Uh…yeah’ Cam replied, patting down the jeans he wore. *They feel so strange…*
‘Did Nathan get them for you?’
‘Uh…yeah’ he said again.
Tracy hummed to herself thoughtfully, before moving away and into the baby’s room.
Cam turned his head to the side, watching her as she lifted the baby from the cot, holding the child close to her and whispering softly to it.
A minute or so later Nathan appeared, stepping out of the bedroom having just woken up. He and Tracy shared the same room, yet slept separately.
‘New clothes?’ he noted, glancing to Cam. ‘Did Tracy get them for you?’
‘Yes’ Cam spoke with more surety this time, slipping the note into his pocket and hiding it.
Nathan sighed wearily, running both his hands through his hair.
‘So, are you ready for breakfast?’ Nathan asked as Tracy returned to the living room, bouncing the baby on her hip. ‘Are you hungry?’
Cam nodded mutely and Nathan moved away.
‘Come on, sit down’ Nathan prompted when Cam had not moved.
Cam swallowed the lump in his throat, taking a step forwards and shifting closer to the table.
He picked a place at random, pulling back the chair and sitting down awkwardly.
‘Any preference?’ Nathan asked him, raising an eyebrow as Cam continued to look lost.
‘Oh what?’ Cam fumbled.
‘For breakfast?’ Nathan said.
‘Oh…no just…anything…I…don’t mind.’
‘Hm.’ Nathan turned away.
Tracy placed the baby in the high chair at one end of the table. The little girl immediately began to bang on the plastic tray before her with her hands, giggling and smiling, staring at Cam.
Cam felt a stab of fear in his heart as he stared back at the child, and her eyes, which were jet black with no other colour.
He clenched his teeth and looked away.
‘Here you are’ Nathan said, placing a bowl and spoon before Cam.
Cam blinked, staring down at it. He picked up the spoon. Nearby Tracy had pulled up a chair beside her baby, spooning mushy food into her daughter’s mouth, her daughter making a mess and giggling happily.
‘Silly girl’ Tracy mumbled to herself fondly, lifting a napkin and wiping the baby’s mouth before trying again.

‘You eat very slowly’ Nathan commented to Cam after a time, still standing as he began to slowly tidy the kitchen, lazily throwing dishes in the sink. ‘Don’t you like it?’
‘It’s not that’ Cam mumbled. ‘It’s just…I'm not used to such food’ he said, staring down at it. ‘What is it…I mean…what do you call it?’
‘Ha!’ Nathan barked a laugh. ‘You really must be from another world’ he spoke with amusement. ‘It’s cereal’ he finished flatly.
‘Cereal’ Cam echoed, speaking slowly.
‘Mh’ Nathan nodded.
Cam raised his head to look at him, gasping involuntarily and drawing back.
‘What?’ Nathan asked.
‘Y-your eye’ Cam fumbled uncertainly, ‘…there’s…. black patches.’
Nathan cursed under his breath, grabbing a spoon and staring closely at his reflection.
Tracy paused, glancing over at him with a frown, holding the baby’s plastic spoon in her hand.
‘Can you help me?’ Nathen said to Tracy then.
‘Sure’ she sighed, rising from her seat and moving over to him.
Even as Cam watched, he could see Nathan’s eyes were quickly changing, both of them, turning back to their natural black, until there was no colour in his eyes at all, only darkness.
‘It’s scary’ Cam uttered.
‘Do I frighten you?’ Nathan asked suddenly turning to him, his eyes wide. Cam could see no pupils there. ‘Now you can see why humans find us unsettling……now you can see why we try to hide it.’
For the longest time Cam was unable to tear his eyes away from Nathan’s, eventually forcing himself to look away, and swallowing hard the lump in his throat.
‘I'm not frightened’ Cam said to him. ‘You don’t scare me.’
‘Liar’ Nathan said shortly before turning away.
He walked across the room and sat in one of the chairs as Tracy went over to a cupboard, pulling out a little plastic box. She opened the box, and Cam’s heart skipped a beat as he saw her pull out a needle.
He watched as she filled the syringe with a strange liquid from a little bottle, going over to Nathan who waited quietly.
‘Ready?’ she said to him in a tired voice.
Cam saw the muscle in Nathan’s jaw tighten, his chest rising and falling, his breath a little quicker.
‘Ready’ Nathan replied quietly.
Tracy leant over him with the needle, blocking him from Cam’s view.
Cam didn’t see what happened, but he saw Nathan’s hand grasp the arms of the chair tightly, heard him grinding his teeth.
When Tracy straightened and stepped back, Nathan leant forwards in his chair, hand going to his eye.
Cam watched from the other side of the room, the baby beside him was silent now.
Nathan hung his head, groaning, before looking up again.

Cam was shocked to see one of his eyes was human once more. The other remained black. His human eye was weeping tears, streaming down his cheek. And even on the other side of the room, Cam could see a little red dot on the white of his eye where the needle had gone in.
'One more' Tracy sighed. 'It's nearly over.'
Tracy leant over him again.
When she was done, she discarded the needle and sat back at the kitchen table, attention returned to her daughter as she continued to try to feed her.
On the other side of the room, Nathan sat hunched in his chair, resting his elbows on his knees with a hand over his eyes. Cam could still see the tears running down his face, dripping from his chin and onto his jeans.
'He's fine' Tracy said to Cam, noticing him watching Nathan with a concerned expression, though she didn't look up. 'Just give him a few minutes.'
'Why…?' Cam managed to utter.
'He's not registered with the organisation' Tracy replied quietly. 'His true nature as a ghoul *must* be kept secret.'
'And you?'
Tracy turned to him with a smile.
'I do the same to fit in' she answered him simply. 'I serve humans in my job after all, it would unsettle the customers to say the least…if they knew I was a ghoul…'
Cam bit his tongue, turning away in silence.
He said no more.

'This could be a wonderful thing for you' Nathan was saying a short time later as he led the way through the busy city streets, with Cam struggling to keep up behind him. 'Whatever you're trying to get away from…. we all need a fresh start in life when things get too bad…'
'So you say' Cam fumbled.
It felt strange for him to be in this busy environment once more, but nowhere near as stressful and frightening as it had been first time, because this time he had company, someone to guide him.
Around them the city was waking up, people thronged the streets, and the roads between the buildings were congested. The noise, from both the traffic and the people, was one long continuous sound.
'Rush hour' Nathan smirked, noticing Cam's attention lingering on the traffic.
'Rush hour?' Cam echoed uncertainly.
'Yeah' Nathan frowned back at him. 'They're all going to work aren't they? Well either that or school.'
'Oh' Cam mumbled, bowing his head.
'And that's where you're going' Nathan smirked back at him, 'to work…'
Cam felt a nervous twinge in his stomach.
'Where are you taking me?'
Nathan faced ahead again as he walked briskly.
'To the same place Tracy works. It's a ghoul haven. Most of the workers are ghouls; the others are sworn to secrecy.'
'Are you going to hurt me?' Cam asked tentatively.

‘No’ Nathan chuckled. ‘If I were to do such I thing…I would have done so already.’
Cam wasn’t sure if he should take comfort in that.
‘You're clearly in need’ Nathan told him. ‘We will care for you, Tracy and I, but you need to work.’ He smiled. ‘It could be good for you, it will keep you busy as least.’
‘As you say.’
‘So, have you had a job before?’ Nathan asked.
‘A job?’
‘Yeah. Like have you done any sort of work before?’
‘I worked on a farm.’
‘That doesn’t really count.’
‘Oh....’
They stopped at the edge of the pavement alongside many others, waiting for the man in the lights to turn green.
‘Then no’ Cam mumbled, ‘I haven’t.’
‘You’ve never had a job before?’
‘No.’
‘Well…’ Nathan gleamed, ‘in that case I’ll tell the boss to go easy on you…’
The man turned greed, and they crossed the road with the crowd, as they did, Cam watched the cars closely. All of them had stopped as the light had changed. He found this curious.
They reached the pavement on the other side and continued walking for a few more moments in silence.
‘Never had a job eh?’ Nathan spoke then, seemingly to himself, as he walked with his hands in his pockets. ‘You must have had a cushioned upbringing.’
Cam thought back to his palace home, back in his old world. He remembered growing up, and the fear he had lived in, the pain, both mental and physical.
‘Not exactly’ Cam spoke quietly.
‘Here we are’ Nathan gleamed, coming suddenly to a stop. ‘Here is where you will be working.’
Cam blinked in surprise up at the building, he recognised it as the one he had been to before, where Tracy had first approached him. He had not recognised the path that led here, the streets were so foreign to him, and everything looked so similar to him, he could not distinguish anything.
‘Here’ Cam managed to utter, staring in nervous expectation up at the large sign at its head.
Already there were a few customers sitting at the tables around them, though it was still early.
‘Come on’ Nathan said, taking a step forward. ‘Let’s go in.’
They entered the building through a small door at the side, hidden away, Cam had not even noticed it.
‘After you’ Nathan gave a nod, holding the door open for Cam.
Cam hesitated only for a split second, reluctant to go in, but despite his fears, he moved forwards.
Through the door there was a small room, opening out immediately into a larger one, where there was a lot of hustle and moving bodies and noise. A kitchen. Cam was just glancing either side of him towards the washing machines and freezers in the smaller room he stood in, when a figure appeared from around the corner, standing before him.

Cam's heart instantly jolted in his chest, and he took an involuntary step backwards.
'Easy Cam' Nathan said, pressing his hand against his back firmly to stop him retreating further. 'There's nothing to be afraid of.'
Cam could not break his gaze away from the man who stood before him, his eyes were jet black.
'A…g-ghoul?'
Nathan frowned at Cam as he came to stand beside him. 'Yeah' he said turning to smile at the stranger. 'He's the cook' he said nodding to him, 'he'll be your new boss.'
'Boss?'
'You're going to be working here' Nathan explained, as the boss cook stood before them looking amused. 'I've already arranged it. They're happy to have you. Isn't that right Bill?' Nathan spoke up.
'Indeed, it is' Bill spoke up, taking a step forwards, closer toward Cam.
Cam drew away, backing himself against the door they had come through, pressing himself against the wood.
'S-stay away from me…' he managed to utter.
'There's no need to be afraid' the black-eyed ghoul spoke to him calmly. 'I won't feed on you. I promise.'
'Come on now Cam' Nathan tutted at him. 'That's no way to talk to your boss.'
Cam clenched his teeth, swallowing the lump in his throat and straightening up.
'You won't hurt me?' he whispered.
'Hand on heart' Bill spoke sombrely.
'I think you should shake hands' Nathan said.
'I…' Cam shook his head worriedly, 'I don't…'
'It's alright' Nathan said to him. 'You can trust him.'
Cam bowed his head, fighting back tears of fear and panic, holding his breath as he fought against his sobs.
He raised his head moments later, forcing himself to smile.
'I'm sorry' he breathed, 'I…I'm just not…familiar with…. I….'
'It's ok' Bill said glancing towards Nathan momentarily before looking back at Cam. 'Nathan's told me…about you…'
'He's told you what?' Cam murmured nervously.
'Your fears' Nathan explained. 'I can only come to the conclusion that you've suffered some sort of trauma in your past…you don't trust strangers…especially men, but you seem to trust women a bit more…you trust Tracy more than me.'
'It's not like that' Cam shook his head. 'I…I trust you…'
'No' Nathan smiled, 'you don't.' He unfolded his arms, smiling wider. 'But you will' he finished, 'I'm sure…in time. What I'm doing here is looking after you. I don't know your past but…' he broke off. 'It's clear to me you don't have a home. Help us…and we will help you. And Bill' he glanced sideways at him, 'I trust him, so you can trust him too…in time' he finished, smiling again.
'Where are you going?' Cam asked nervously as Nathan walked past him, heading for the door back outside.

‘I've got things to do’ Nathan replied. ‘There is…strife in the city. You won’t see it, but ghouls like me hold territories over the city, there are secret wars always waging. I don’t get fed by the organisation. I have to fend for myself. That involves a lot of danger, a lot of risk, a lot of fighting…I have to compete for my territory, or I starve.’ He smiled again. ‘I’ll meet you back here when your shift ends, ok?’
‘I…’ Cam shook his head, still a little confused.
‘It gets easier after the first day’ Nathan told him confidently. ‘Just hang in there, we’ll meet up later.’
And then he was gone.
Cam stared longingly after him, feeling lost, feeling alone.
Don’t leave me…
Cam’s eyes fell to the ground, before he glanced around, attention flickering towards the man known as Bill, the boss and cook in the kitchen.
‘I’ll be looking after you today’ Bill told him as Cam turned reluctantly around to face him. ‘You’ll be put to work, I’ll go easy on you today, but in time you will be serving customers.’
‘Ok’ Cam said breathlessly, heart pounding in his chest and palms sweating.
‘Have you worked before?’ Bill asked him, heading back towards the kitchen, Cam following him.
‘Only…once’ Cam answered, thinking back again to the time he had lived and worked as a farmer. ‘But nothing like this…’
‘That’s fine’ Bill replied, ‘we get a lot of new workers passing through here.’
‘Hey is that a new kid?’
Cam glanced around at the figure that had spoken, a young woman with hair tied back, and eyes jet black like the cooks.
Another ghoul?
‘My name is Belle’ the figure replied, ‘what's your name?’
Cam faltered, glancing down at her, she was dressed the same as Tracy had been, in the same uniform.
‘Um…it’s Cam’ he replied.
‘Waw’ she gushed, ‘so you're the new guy.’
‘I guess…’ Cam mumbled, drawing back slightly.
‘He’s a little shy’ Bill explained.
‘Oh, I see’ Belle gleamed.
‘So, um…’ Cam began nervously, ‘how come…I mean…um…your eyes.’ He said. ‘How come…Nathan doesn’t keep his eyes black and you do?’
‘We stay in the kitchen’ Belle explained. ‘We don’t see the customers. I couldn’t stand injecting my eye like that….it makes me shiver, I hate needles…anyway I'm supposed to be showing you around.’
‘But what about after work?’ Cam asked.
‘I wear dark glasses to hide my eyes’ Belle said. ‘So anyway, I'm supposed to be helping you today. We’ll stay in the kitchen for now…’
‘I’ll leave you to it’ Bill said to Belle. ‘I hear you're more comfortable around women than men anyway’ he finished speaking to Cam.
Cam watched him leave, his throat feeling dry, before turning back to Belle.

‘So, um…’ Cam began awkwardly, ‘what am I supposed to do…?’

Later that day, after his shift had ended, Cam waited awkwardly by the door, hoping Nathan would appear soon to take him home. He didn’t fully trust him still, but he realised now how much he depended on him, alone in this strange and unfamiliar world.
After a few more minutes passed, Belle approached him.
‘Still not here hu?’ she said to him, glancing about her as if Nathan would suddenly appear at any moment, as if he might be hiding. ‘That’s not like him at all.’
‘Do you think something might be wrong?’ Cam asked nervously.
‘Hmm’ Belle frowned, ‘I don’t know, it’s possible.’
Cam watched her expectantly, blinking several times.
‘Oh’ Belle said, ‘I suppose I should be saying something positive right?’
‘Um…’
‘I'm afraid I can’t’ Belle spoke seriously, moving towards the door. ‘Nathan is not registered with the organisation, he cannot work, he has to feed himself…it’s a dangerous life. I would love to help him, we all would, everyone who knows him…he is a good man…’ she paused then. ‘But there is only so much we can do’ she continued. ‘The ghouls that are registered with the organisation are given only enough food to feed themselves…so we cannot share.’
‘Oh…’ Cam said.
Cam’s eyes lowered to the ground, before glancing back up at Belle.
‘What would happen…’ he asked, ‘if Nathan was caught?’
‘Most likely he would be killed’ Belle spoke sadly. ‘Come on’ she added in a quiet voice, ‘I’ll take you home.’
‘N-no its fine’ Cam fumbled. ‘I don’t want to be a bother.’
‘Cam’ Belle spoke seriously, ‘don’t give me that, I won’t take it. We ghouls have to stick together.’
‘I am not a ghoul’ Cam replied.
‘I know’ Belle replied, ‘I don’t know what you are’ she said, ‘but I know you are different…special.’
‘Nathan told you…?’
‘He said he saw you glow’ Belle replied. ‘I don’t know if I believe that…but that’s what he said anyway, and he’s sticking to that story.’ She smiled. ‘I don’t know what you are’ she said again, ‘but I'm feeling that maybe you *can* help us after all.’
She reached into her pocket, bringing out a pair of sunglasses and putting them on.
‘What do you think?’ she grinned at him, splaying her hands and tilting her head playfully.
Cam blinked uncertainly, clenching his jaw.
Belle giggled at his awkwardness, before heading to the door, walking with confidence.
‘Hey’ she called out to Cam, pausing on the threshold. ‘Are you coming?’
‘Where are we going?’
‘I'm taking you home’ Belle told him. ‘I need to look after you.’
‘Do you think something will happen?’ Cam asked nervously, moving towards her.
‘You never know what could happen’ Belle answered seriously, as he stepped through the door back outside.

Belle walked him home, right up to the front door of the apartment. Inside they found Tracy.
'Where's Nathan?' she asked them worriedly as they entered.
'He was supposed to meet me after work' Cam explained, 'but he never came.'
Belle gave Cam an envelope with money inside, what he had earned working that day.
'It's ok' Belle said, speaking confidently to Cam and Tracy, 'I'm sure he will turn up when he is ready and able.'
The next day, Cam and Tracy carrying the baby with her, went out together shopping to buy Cam some new clothes, using the money he had earned the previous day.
It was here they came across Nathan.
He had his hands in his pocket and his hood raised. But it was clear from the way he walked that he was badly injured.
'Nathan…' Tracy had gasped at the sight of him.
Nathan had smiled at her, hiding his pain well.
'Can we go home?' he asked her, 'please…'
When they got home, Nathan removed the majority of his clothes, showing the extent of his injuries.
Cam walked cautiously around Tracy as she tended to him, seeing the dried blood on Nathan's skin, behind him the baby gurgled in her chair.
Nathan's flesh in places looked at if it had been ripped. Cam was convinced those were teeth marks that he saw.
'They jumped me' Nathan grimaced. 'I was able to get away…change my clothes…I…hid for a while…'
He drew a sharp intake of breath as Tracy pressed a damp cloth to one of the wounds.
'God that stings like a fucking bitch' Nathan rasped, beside him was a bowl of warm water Tracy was using to wash him, the water already pink.
Cam looked at the bottle on the table, the bottle Tracy had tipped on the cloth before pressing it to Nathan's wound, the label read TCP.
Nathan also had scratches over his face and neck, what looked like a deep bite in his shoulder, and…
'Is that…' Cam spoke up tentatively, 'a knife wound…?'
Nathan just smiled weakly at him.
'Cam' Tracy spoke abruptly. 'Hold this cloth to him, I need to get fresh water.'
Cam moved around her, taking the cloth from Tracy and pressing it firmly to Nathan's side.
Nathan let out a heavy breath; Cam glanced tentatively up at him.
'Nathan' Cam spoke slowly, 'your eyes…they're turning black again.'
'Yeah' Nathan rasped, smiling again. But he said no more.
'What happened out there?' Cam asked, as behind him Tracy filled the plastic bowl with fresh warm water.
'They…' Nathan breathed, his eyes distant, 'they were trying to eat me alive…'
Cam felt a stab of fear in his heart.
'They would do that?' he asked before he could stop himself.
'Yes' Nathan nodded, 'that…and much worse…if they could…' he fell silent.
Nathan glanced towards him then as Tracy came back to his side, dipping a fresh cloth into the bowl and pressing it to his shoulder as Cam continued to hold the cloth to his side. Blood

and water trickled down his chest and back from the wound on his shoulder as Tracy worked to clean it.
‘I don’t kill through choice’ Nathan voiced suddenly, addressing Cam, ‘I kill because I have to……if I don’t get human flesh…’ he breathed, ‘…I die……’
Cam lowered his eyes, glancing away, feeling uncomfortable.

That evening, Nathan went to bed early to rest, Tracy was clearing the kitchen after they had finished their meal, and Cam leant on the windowsill, staring outwards, up towards the darkening sky.
‘The stars here are difficult to see’ he voiced, speaking to himself, but Tracy answered anyway.
‘We’re in the city’ she explained, ‘light pollution…it blocks the stars.’
Cam tilted his head at this, hearing her words.
‘I wonder how long I will stay here in this world’ he spoke, quiet enough so that she could not hear him. ‘What is my purpose of being here? Where are the masked figures? What am I supposed to be learning in this place?’ He paused then, staring at the streetlights around their apartment complex. ‘I am beginning to fear’ he mumbled, ‘…that I may never leave this world.’

Time passed, and the longer Cam stayed here in this world, the more the days seemed to blend together.
He woke early in the mornings, worked in the café, sometimes alongside Tracy. He would earn money, spend a bit of it, stay at the apartment, or go out about the city, but he never left the city itself.
And on some days, he would go out with Nathan alone, and they would wander the city together, wasting time.
On one of these days, Nathan took Cam to a part of the city that was utterly deserted, an overpass. Here it was dark, the buildings around them were tall, and from where they stood beneath the overpass, they could not be seen by wandering eyes. It was as if they were in their own little world.
‘So, what are we doing here?’ Cam asked quietly, gazing about them at the dark place, feeling a foreboding presence closing in all around.
There was so much grey in this world, so much concrete.
Nathan walked beside him, slowing to a stop, head bowed.
‘I'm going to teach you how to fight.’
Cam turned to face Nathan, eyes wide with surprise.
‘Fight?’ Cam echoed. ‘But…why?’
‘Because it would be foolish not to’ Nathan replied simply. ‘Have you ever been in a fight before?’
‘I don’t think so…’ Cam answered weakly.
‘Have you ever felt physical pain?’

Cam laughed humourlessly at this.
‘You have no idea’ he replied flatly.
‘Then you can take a hit.’
‘What?’
Nathan swung a fist at him, punching him squarely in the jaw. Cam stumbled back in shock but he did not fall over, his head whipped back around to face Nathan again.
‘What-?’
But Cam was unable to ask as Nathan swung at him again, this time hitting his jaw from below. Cam bit his tongue hard, instantly tasting blood. He stumbled back and dropped to a knee as Nathan’s foot shot out, kicking him hard in the thigh. Cam rolled to the side just in time, missing Nathan’s next blow as he brought his fist down with all the strength he could muster, aiming for his shoulder.
Cam drew back sharply, creating a wide space between them.
‘Sss…stay away from me!’
‘At least say it with more conviction’ Nathan replied flatly, ignoring Cam’s demand and sauntering towards him.
‘I said stay away!’
Cam was beginning to panic now as Nathan approached, backing himself against the wall.
He wanted to run, to get away from Nathan. But his mind had gone blank, and he could only stand there, palms pressed against the wall behind him, wishing for escape.
‘Why are you so afraid?’ Nathan asked, slowing to a stop before him.
Cam could only stare back, frozen, speechless.
Nathan raised his hand, indicating.
‘You're bleeding.’
Cam wiped at his lip, swallowing the blood in his mouth.
‘I just bit my tongue’ he mumbled absently, avoiding Nathan’s stare.
‘You know the tongue is one of the best bits’ Nathan spoke quietly.
Cam’s attention shot back to him then, fear jolting through his heart.
‘You're still scared of me?’ Nathan asked, knowing already the answer. ‘Perhaps you should be, I could kill you after all…but then…I'm no stronger than the average man…than the average human. Wouldn’t it be great if you knew how to protect yourself?’ he paused then, letting the words sink in. ‘I could show you how to fight…teach you what I know. I'm no expert, but I can more than hold my own if it were to come down to it.’
Cam stared back at him wide eyed, unable to move for a time.
‘If I wanted to kill you’ Nathan spoke seriously, ‘I would not be putting in this trouble. I'm helping you because I think that you could help me in turn.’
‘You….’ Cam uttered, ‘want my power…?’
‘I want your help’ Nathan spoke in a level tone. ‘I've stopped caring long ago about what happens to me…I know it’s only a matter of time…but the baby…and Tracy…’ he trailed off, eyes growing distant. ‘I want to protect them’ he mumbled, ‘as much as I can.’
A short time later, they rested, sitting some distance apart upon a ledge, looking over at the dark enclosed place around them.
‘This world is such a strange place’ Cam spoke up at last, breaking the silence, ‘…it’s so different from my own…’

Nathan chuckled to himself quietly.
‘You're still going on about that?’ he smirked.
‘It’s because it’s true’ Cam replied flatly, knowing Nathan was not taking him seriously, knowing he would never take him seriously. But it still felt good to talk about it. ‘I miss my brother’ Cam spoke, eyes distant, ‘I wonder what he’s doing now.’
‘Your brother?’ Nathan tilted his head.
‘We’re twins. I am the older twin…I was born first.’
Nathan sat with his back to Cam, resting with his elbows on his knees, staring out into nothing.
‘Have you ever thought of having children?’ Nathan asked him out of the blue. ‘It would be safe for you…if you wanted to…’
Cam blinked slowly. ‘No’ he spoke at last. ‘Such a thought has never occurred to me.’
‘I would like to have children’ Nathan spoke in a distant voice, ‘a child of my own…or maybe two.’ He paused then, going silent for a moment. ‘I would like that very much.’
‘Have you…’ Cam asked tentatively, ‘had a companion…. someone you loved?’
Nathan bowed his head, smiling then. But Cam saw the sadness in his eyes.
‘Come on’ Nathan said, rising suddenly. ‘It’s getting late, we should get going. Tracy’s making a wonderful meal tonight…I wouldn’t want to be late, its best when it’s hot.’
‘What is it?’ Cam asked nervously.
‘Lasagne’ Nathan winked.
‘What's that?’ Cam asked.
Nathan turned away, rolling his eyes.
‘It’s beef’ he replied, ‘you know…cow.’
‘Oh…’ Cam sighed, visibly relieved.
‘Don’t worry’ Nathan said to him as they made their way. ‘We would never try to feed you what we eat…human meat is too rare a gift for us to share…’

Many weeks passed, and Cam was growing accustom to this strange world, this modern world. He was learning slowly how everything worked, and was even after a time beginning to feel like he fit in. Even his work he was becoming comfortable with. He had never had to deal with customer service before, but it was certainly an experience. He felt he had learned much.

One day, when Cam was serving a customer in the café, something stood out to him.
It would not have been obvious to anyone else, but to him it was.
Cam made the drink, putting it on a tray and carrying it to the table. The woman sitting at the table did not look at him as he placed the coffee before her; instead she continued reading her book.
But instead of returning to the counter as he usually did, Cam just stared at her.
‘What do you want?’ the woman asked at last, glancing up at him. ‘Don’t you have work to do?’

Cam narrowed his eyes at her, but still did not move.
'We both know you're not reading that book' he told her flatly. 'Did you forget your mask today?'
The woman's expression suddenly broke into a great smile.
'What gave me away?' she asked him, putting the book down.
'You're human' Cam said to her, 'I know that, but you still look different from other people…you look…. unnatural.'
'How?'
'You look too perfect.'
'Hmm' the woman said turning away from him.
'Why am I here?' Cam suddenly voiced.
'What do you mean?' she asked him, turning back.
'I've been here for weeks' Cam said to her. 'I'm supposed to be learning how to control my magic…. what am I doing here?'
'It is all experience' the mask-less figure said simply to him.
'This isn't helping me' Cam persisted. 'I need to master my powers…so that I can return home.'
'So, you want something to happen' the woman said, eyes flickering to his. 'It will' she said knowingly to him. 'Don't you worry…'
Cam returned home that afternoon feeling uneasy, though he wasn't sure why. The appearance of the female figure, one of those who were usually masked and robed, made him suddenly nervous. And her words sounded almost like a threat.
Cam tried to push these thoughts from his mind.
'It's probably nothing' he told himself. 'No point in worrying.'
He reached the apartment to find Tracy there.
'Cam' she said when he walked through the front door. 'There you are. Have you seen Nathan? He should have been back by now.'
Cam's heart instantly rose in his chest, and his stomach constricted.
'No' he told her. 'I…I haven't.'
Tracy bit her lip nervously, mumbling to herself.
'Where is he?' she said glancing away. 'He's supposed to be here. Dammit I hate it when he goes missing like this..... I worry so much for him...'
She turned back to Cam.
'I haven't fed for several days. I'm starving. I *have* to go to the organisation now to eat.' She hesitated. 'Can you look after the baby?'
Cam blinked in surprise, caught off guard. They had never trusted him alone with the baby before, not because had ever done anything, but because she was so precious to both of them. He had been allowed to look after her while the others were around, to feed her, hold her, play with her, but only when they were around.
'I…' Cam began, 'I mean…yes…alright.'
Tracy nodded. Cam could see she was nervous, and that she didn't fully trust him. He saw her swallow, clench her teeth, her body tense.
But she had no choice; she *had* to go to the organisation. If she didn't, they would become suspicious of her, and may even investigate. That would put her baby in danger, and she

didn't want to risk it. They would surely take it away from her, who knew what else they might do.
'Alright' she said moving away and grabbing her things. 'I'll be a while.'
She put her coat and shoes on, wrapping a scarf loosely around her neck.
'Please look after her' she said to him, pausing at the door. 'Nathan should be back…maybe he'll be along soon.' She hesitated, looking about the room as if about to say something else. But in the end, she decided against it.
'Just…' she said at last, lingering in the doorway with her hand upon the doorframe, '…look after her.'
'I will' Cam nodded. 'I promise.'
She let out a sigh, waiting a few more seconds, before closing the door reluctantly.
She was gone now, and Cam was alone.
Cam turned away. The feeling of uncertainty and nervousness didn't leave him.
He balled his fists, relaxing them again before walking away from the living room and towards the baby's room.
He opened the door; peering in to see her.
The little creature was fast asleep, still and peaceful, with not a care in the world. Her eyes were closed now, hiding the blackness.
Cam bowed his head, closing the door again quietly and wandering through the apartment listlessly.

Interlude start

'Perfect' the masked figure said, watching Cam closely on the monitor. 'He is alone now. A perfect opportunity.'
The figure smiled beside him smiled, cocking his head at his companion, grinning with amusement.
'What will you do?'

Interlude end

For nearly an hour, Cam stared out of the window in the kitchen as the sky outside began to grow dark. Nathan could often be seen returning home this way, and on some days Cam would sit by the window and watch as he returned. But tonight, Cam saw no sign of him.
He began to grow worried, fearing that something might have happened to him.
This was not the first time Nathan had gone missing, and the last time he had finally returned, he had been gravely injured. Cam couldn't help but wonder and think.... maybe this was the time he did not return, maybe this time he had been killed, by a ghoul? Or a human perhaps... a member of the organisation known only as 'C'.
'Nathan' Cam whispered to himself. 'Where are you?'

He heard the sound of the front door opening suddenly, tensing slightly. He straightened, moving away from the window and rounding the corner as he headed to the front door, expecting to see Nathan there. Though he had not seen him through the window in the street below, he must have come another way, or perhaps it was Tracy.
To his shock however, he saw neither of them. Instead he saw three figures he did not recognise.
Two were men; one appeared to be about twenty in age, the other nearly thirty. The older one had a scar on one side of his face that looked almost like his skin had been torn, the younger was very slender and with no scarring. Cam could see as the younger one smirked, that he had sharp teeth.
Ghouls Cam thought with alarm, his attention turning then onto the young woman who stood between them, she must have been perhaps about seventeen. She had bare arms and shoulders and wore high boots. Her long blonde hair was tied in a high ponytail.
'Awww' the woman complained loudly. 'He's not here.'
'Who are you looking for?' Cam asked quickly, his voice high in panic.
'Someone who is not you' the young woman answered shortly.
Her attention lingered on him then, and a hungry look crossed her eyes.
'Although' she spoke slowly, 'you might perhaps be useful to us.'
She closed the door behind her with a snap, rounding on him.
'Are you boys hungry?' she asked the figures either side of her.
The older smirked suddenly. 'Can't pass up the opportunity of such easy prey' he spoke in an almost seductive voice.
The younger man said nothing.
Oh god Cam thought in alarm. *They're going to kill me!*
He grabbed the nearest thing at hand, which happened to be a lamp, and sent it hurling across the room at them.
The female ghoul knocked it aside with ease, glaring at him in annoyance.
'Stop that.'
Cam wheeled around then, tearing toward the kitchen and pulling a drawer open, fumbling for a knife.
Behind them the three figures advanced.
As long as they don't find the baby Cam thought desperately as they trapped him in the kitchen, standing in a row in the doorway.
There was no escape now, not that Cam would try. He wouldn't leave the child here on her own, not when Tracy had entrusted her to him…not after they had helped him. After everything they had done for him.
I cannot escape he thought desperately to himself. *I cannot escape.*
'Don't make this hard for us' the older male ghoul sighed to him. 'There's no way you can get away now. You're a dead man.'
'I'm starving' the young woman said, already beginning to salivate. 'I haven't eaten in weeks. Though I wonder why Nathan has a human living with him. He smells so good. I wonder why he's here?'
'Let's hurry up and get this over with' the younger male ghoul said. 'Then let's get out of here. Nathan isn't here. There's no point in hanging around.'

‘What do you want with him?’ Cam demanded. ‘What do you want with Nathan?’
‘We’re going to kill him’ the slender male ghoul told him. ‘He is a threat to us, a threat to our gang.’
The older male ghoul stepped into the room then, advancing on Cam.
Fear began to quickly rise inside him.
Cam made a lunge at the ghoul, wielding the knife in his hand. But in one quick movement the older ghoul had disarmed him.
It happened so fast, Cam didn’t realise *what* had happened.
The knife fell to the floor as the ghoul moved around him, grabbing him from behind.
Cam gasped in shock, eyes wide with fear.
How could I be so weak? Cam thought, as the older ghoul tightened his grip around him, holding him beneath his arms so he could not move. A split second later, and Cam experienced the now familiar feeling of teeth sinking into him.
His heart dropped in his chest, and the male ghoul quickly let go of him, stepping away.
Cam knew that he would feel dizzy soon. He knew that he had been poisoned, like he had before, when Nathan attacked him.
The older ghoul wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, licking the blood from his lips, from the back of his hand. He turned back to Cam as he stumbled then, grasping onto his fresh wound that seared in pain, holding the kitchen counter with the other hand as his world began to tilt.
‘Get away from me…’ Cam gasped to them, as his legs began to tremble. ‘Don’t touch me…’
He moaned; falling to his knees as the three figures loomed over him. Like Nathan had done before…they were simply waiting.
‘Oh’ the female ghoul said clapping her hands gleefully. ‘He’s going to be so tasty.’
A sad look crossed her face suddenly, as she leant forward towards him.
Cam stared back up at her unblinking.
‘Still…’ she said. ‘It’s a shame to eat someone so handsome.’
‘Get away’ Cam said baring his teeth at her. ‘I'm not going to let you eat me.’
But there was no conviction in his voice, and he was becoming steadily weaker by the second.
‘How are you going to stop us?’ the female ghoul asked him simply.
Cam turned his head away, thinking desperately.
Are the masked figures watching? Oh Gods……what's going to happen…?’
He squeezed his eyes tight shut.
My powers… he thought. *I have to use my powers…*
‘I will kill you…’ Cam gasped, ‘if you try to hurt me.’
‘All talk’ the young female ghoul sighed as she straightened, her demeanour calm, hands upon her hip. ‘We’ll feed on you soon.’
Cam could feel the numbness spreading down his legs, up his body and running across his chest to his shoulders.
He realised with alarm that the older ghouls poison was a lot stronger than Nathan’s
No, he thought desperately, *I can’t die here…I have to protect the child…I have to live…I have to master my powers so that I can go home…why…why won’t my magic come to me?!*
Cam opened his eyes, tears of fear and frustration coming to him.

What good is my magic if I cannot use it….? I don't…I don't even know how to summon it to me…!

He gasped then as the female ghoul knelt before him, leaning over him and sinking her teeth deep into his shoulder, as he was bitten again.

Cam moaned in pain as she tore the raw flesh from his body, unable to speak now, the numb feeling had spread to his throat and tongue.

He was in agony, eyes watering and tears of pain running from his cheeks as she began to eat him alive.

The female ghoul swallowed, moving forward to bite him again.

She gasped suddenly, leaning back away from him.

'What the hell?!!'

She leapt up, stepping away as the ghouls behind her tensed at the sight of Cam as he began to glow.

Cam was unaware of what happened next, his memory had been lost to him.

He woke several hours later. The clock on the wall said it was three in the morning.

The apartment was silent all around him, and Cam slowly gathered the strength to stand.

All the lights were off around him, the apartment was deserted, neither Tracy nor Nathan had returned, and he was completely alone.

Cam pushed himself up, gathering his feet beneath him; body hunched over in pain as the effects from the poison slowly began to wear off, as his mind began to focus.

He grabbed a clean kitchen towel from the cupboard, soaking it in the sink before pressing it to his shoulder, teeth gritting in pain as the wound stung him deeply. Dried blood crusted his clothes and had pooled on the kitchen floor.

He washed most of the blood away, before moving gingerly out of the kitchen, heading across the living room and towards the child's bedroom to check on her.

He leaning over her crib to see her safe and sound and fast asleep.

'Oh thank gods...' he sighed.

He bent down gingerly and picked her up, lifting her carefully in his arms. The baby shifted slightly, waking and frowning, but stayed silent.

The child's eyes were jet black and large as she looked up at him, but she closed her eyes again, seeming to go back to sleep.

Cam turned and walked from the room, carrying the baby in his arms.

He left the apartment with the child, wandering through the dark streets alone, fearing the three ghouls would come back to finish him off, fearing that they might find the child.

He fled, wandering the dark alleyways alone with the baby.

Eventually he came across a figure.

'Is this what you wanted?' he snarled at the figure as the child began to cry in his arms. 'Is this what you wanted…?'

The masked figure stood before him, dark cloak and gloves making him almost invisible in the night.

But Cam could see him.

'This was not the plan' the masked figure told him, speaking in a male voice. 'We did not intend for this to happen…but don't worry…I'll set things right.'

Cam heard a groan then, the sound of a man in pain.

He turned towards the sound, clutching the child more firmly to his chest.
Coming toward him he saw a man. His eyes widened in recognition.
'Nathan…?'
Cam glanced back to the masked figure, only to find him gone. He looked back at Nathan.
'Cam…' Nathan groaned, body hunched over as he hugged himself. 'What are you doing here?'
'Ghouls came to the apartment' Cam told him, glancing down at the baby in his arms. 'They attacked me…'
'The child?' Nathan gasped, taking an urgent step forwards.
'Safe' Cam told him looking up again. 'Unharmed.'
Nathan let out a sigh of relief, smiling widely now. He moved closer to Cam, gently talking the baby from him.
Cam stepped back, watching Nathan closely as he held the child in his arms tenderly. It looked as if he had been ravaged by an animal, there were tears and bites all over his body, and he bled profusely from these many wounds.
It's happened again… Cam thought sadly as he watched him. *He lives such a dangerous life……it's only a matter of time before he gets killed.....*
'Where's Tracy?' Nathan asked in a husky voice.
'I don't know' Cam told him quietly. 'She went to the organisation to feed. She hasn't come back yet.'
'Shouldn't worry then' Nathan mumbled. 'She'll be alright…' He looked up at Cam again. 'Why did you leave the apartment?'
'I thought the ghouls might come back' Cam explained. 'They said they were looking for you.'
Nathan nodded. 'Yes' he said turning away again. 'Yes…'
Nathan gritted his teeth, brow furrowed.
'We have to find Tracy, we have to get back to Tracy' Nathan spoke. 'We have to return to the apartment.'
'Is that safe?' Cam asked. 'Are you going to be ok?'
'Yes' Nathan rasped. 'I'll be fine.'
Nathan bit his own wrist then, the blood running quickly. He dribbled a few drops into the baby's mouth. The baby began to smile as she fed, happy.
'It's not much' Nathan said to himself as he did this. 'But this should be enough for the meantime.'
He raised his head to Cam then.
'I will go alone. It is safer I think. Can I leave the baby with you?'
'Yes' Cam said.
Nathan moved closer to Cam again, handing the baby back to him.
'I trust you now' Nathan said. 'Thank you for trying to protect her. I'm happy. You've done well.'
Cam blinked in surprise, staring uncertainly back at him.
'Listen…' Nathan sighed wearily, 'I know this is a strange request…and I wouldn't ask unless I had to…'
'Yes?' Cam replied tentatively, 'what is it?'

‘I'm starving’ Nathan said, his voice breaking. ‘I am so weak…I was wondering if I could feed from you…it would only be some blood, nothing more.’
Nathan bowed his head. He seemed reluctant to ask.
‘Is it…going to hurt?’ Cam asked tentatively.
‘Yeah’ Nathan replied awkwardly, ‘a bit.’ He raised his head again. ‘I promise I will try to be gentle…and take only as much blood as I need.’
Cam clenched his teeth, swallowing.
‘Will it poison me?’ he asked. ‘Will it make me feel weak?’
‘Yes’ Nathan replied. ‘I'm sorry…but…if there was any other way…’
‘Alright’ Cam nodded. ‘I’ll do it. I owe you after all…after everything you’ve done for me.’
‘Thank you’ Nathan breathed, nodding once. ‘Thank you.’
He hesitated for an instant, before taking a step towards Cam.
Cam turned his head to the side, as Nathan pulled back his shirt, exposing the flesh of his shoulder.
‘I'm sorry’ Nathan breathed, seeing the old wound upon Cam’s shoulder, the one he had received from the other ghouls.
Nathan opened his mouth wide.
Cam drew a sharp intake of breath, gritting his teeth in pain, his whole-body tense.
Nathan drew blood from him, Cam remained where he was standing, waiting silently as Nathan drank, feeling everything. With every passing moment, Cam could feel himself growing weaker.
After a time, Nathan drew back, wiping his mouth.
‘How do you feel?’ Nathan asked Cam.
Cam raised his hand, touching the fresh wound tenderly.
‘I’ll be alright’ Cam sighed, leaning back against the wall. ‘Just…’ he grimaced. ‘Go and find Tracy.’
Nathan nodded, straightening, he appeared a little stronger now.
‘I’ll find her’ he breathed, ‘I’ll find her.’ He glanced about him, seeing the silent streets around. ‘Stay hidden’ he said to Cam. I will find you later.’
‘Alright’ Cam breathed.
‘And Cam?’ Nathan paused.
‘Yes?’ Cam raised his head.
Nathan glanced down at the child. ‘Look after her.’
Cam blinked slowly.
Nathan turned and strode away, quickly slipping from view.
Cam bowed his head, feeling incredibly weak. He sat, resting in the quiet alley, holding the child in his arms. She was quiet now, seeming to have fallen asleep again, peaceful, having fed.
‘You're a good child’ Cam whispered to the baby. ‘Thank you for being quiet.’
He closed his eyes, tilting his head back against the cold brick wall behind, becoming still.
He rested.

Cam returned to the apartment several hours later when the sun began to rise, carrying the baby in his arms, she was still asleep.
To his horror, he found the apartment was in a state. Everything had been destroyed and there was blood on the walls.
Cam's breath caught in his throat, and he stood in the doorway, rooted to the spot.
He was only broken from his trance when he heard some sounds coming through the window from outside.
Cam snapped back to attention, striding through the apartment, stepping over the broken bits of furniture as he made his way to the kitchen.
Holding the baby close to his chest, he leant over the counter, heart tight inside him as he stared in horror out of the window at what he saw.
The street below the apartment could be seen. And here he saw Nathan, injured worse than he had been before and surrounded by several figures in black trousers and shirts. They did not look like ghouls. Perhaps this was the organisation he feared so much.
Nathan was on his knees now, and was hysterical.
He appeared to be begging them and trying to reason with them. They surrounded him in a complete circle.
Cam stared, frozen in horror as he leant over the counter.
One of the men dressed in black raised a gun to Nathan's head and fired, killing him instantly.
Cam let out a cry of fear and anguish, body beginning to tremble at the horror he had seen before him, unable to tear his eyes away at the scene beyond the window. Nathan's dead body began to twitch on the ground, a pool of blood seeping from the hole in his head.
The baby in his arms began to cry, snapping Cam from his trance.
The men dressed in black outside turned their head up to the window, hearing the baby cry.
Cam drew sharply back from the window, not knowing if he had been seen or not.
He turned and fled the apartment, vowing never to return.
He wandered the city for hours, heading away as far as he could.
Utterly exhausted, he came to rest in a graveyard, sitting back against a tree and closing his eyes. He fed the child when she began to cry, cutting himself and dribbling the blood into her mouth, as Nathan had done before.
She had fallen silent after that, sleeping in his arms as he sat there.
At one point an elderly lady approached him.
'Are you alright?' she said to him.
Cam opened his eyes, raising his head to the old lady.
'That's a cute little baby' the old lady smiled. 'Is it a boy or girl?'
Cam stared at the old lady, blinking slowly and wearily. The baby had her eyes closed now, so the woman could not see the jet-black eyes of a ghoul.
'It's a girl.'
'What's her name?'
Cam stared.
'Lisa' he said, sounding uncertain at himself.
'Where is her mother?' the old lady asked.
Cam stared across at the graveyard, his thoughts were slow.

‘She’s dead’ he said at last.
‘I'm sorry to hear that.’
Cam considered the old lady for a moment, as possibility ran through his mind.
‘Have you children of your own?’
‘I have had few’ the old lady nodded. ‘I visit my granddaughter now’ she said mournfully, ‘who was taken from us far too young. She was just a baby…she is with God now.’
Cam’s eyes slowly widened as a thought struck him. Perhaps he could give the baby to her. He could not return to the apartment now, it was too dangerous, with Nathan dead, and Tracy perhaps dead also. He had nowhere to go, and no way to care for the baby in the long term. He now had no home to sleep this night, and the nights were becoming colder.
He wondered briefly what had happened in the apartment, and whose blood was upon the walls.
‘It’s so unfair’ Cam mumbled to himself.
‘What is?’ the lady asked.
‘Everything…life…to have young ones suffer so…’ he thought of his own past. ‘I'm sorry you lost your granddaughter.’
‘It cannot be helped’ the old lady answered sadly. ‘She died of illness. It was nobody’s fault.’
Cam frowned to himself, his thoughts moving elsewhere.
He came to realise that he could not give the baby to her. The old lady was human, and the child a ghoul.
How could she possibly care for a child that needs flesh to survive?
No. This child needed a ghoul to care for her.
Cam rose.
‘It was nice to meet you’ he said to the lady, before moving away.
A ghoul he thought. *I need to find a ghoul…an illegal gang…they hold territories and hunt at night.*
He slowed to a stop, realising suddenly.
‘I know how to find what I need.’

That night, he was found by the three figures again as he wandered the streets, seeking to be found. It was dark, and there were no other signs of life in the city, save for the ghouls.
It was their time.
The three ghouls that had entered the apartment and had tried to kill him, he found them here now.
‘What are you doing here?’ the young female ghoul sneered at him. ‘Haven’t you had enough? Do you *want* to die?’
‘I have a favour to beg of you’ Cam said, falling to his knees through exhaustion and offering the child to her. ‘Please…do what you want with me…but please…care for this child…she has no other home.’
The female ghoul stared down in shock at the child, unsure at first how to answer.
‘You're not a ghoul’ the older scared male said to him stepping forwards. ‘How did you get this child?’
‘And how do you know we won’t just kill her?’ the younger male ghoul said to him.

‘The mother is missing’ Cam said. ‘Perhaps even dead. Her father is dead, the other ghoul who cared for her also is dead, and I cannot return to the place I called home.’ He bowed his head, holding the baby before him. ‘Do what you want with me. Kill me if you want…just please…care for this child…’
They loomed over him, for the longest time none of them moved.
Then at last the female ghoul stepped forward.
Cam allowed her to take the child from him. She held the baby close, gazing down at her. A kind expression crossed her face then.
‘Was she in the apartment when we met last?’ she asked Cam.
‘Yes’ he nodded. ‘She was there.’
She looked back at the baby. ‘She’s beautiful’ the female ghoul smiled widely now, making the baby giggle as she ticked her cheeks. ‘Such beautiful dark eyes she has.’ She glanced to Cam again. ‘What is her name?’
‘She doesn’t have one.’
The female ghoul stepped back. She turned and walked away, taking the child with her. Cam watched her go, leaving the baby to her unknown fate.
The younger male ghoul approached him then, grasping him by the hair and jerking his head back.
Cam tensed, flinching and squeezing his eyes tight shut, expecting at any moment to feel the ghoul’s sharp teeth sink into his flesh.
But when several seconds passed and nothing happened, Cam opened his eyes.
The male ghoul let go of him, he turned and walked away after the female ghoul, followed by the older ghoul. They walked down the alley without another word, vanishing from sight.
Cam stared after them in shock, not believing at first what had happened.
He was sure they would kill him, he was sure he would die that day, and yet he sought them out anyway.
Cam bowed his head, still reeling from what had just happened. He had been so close to death, he was sure of it. Why had they spared him?
Cam felt suddenly dizzy then. Weak from lack of sleep, lack of food and physically and mentally exhausted. He fainted, falling to his side, as darkness took over him.

When he woke next, he was in a different place altogether.
Cam’s first sense that came to him was hearing, as he heard the sound of waves rolling up the shore. He opened his eyes to find himself lying on his front on a beach.
He blinked several times as he watched the water before him lapping gently up at the shore, the small waves rolling up the sands, before retreating, and rising up the shore again in a never-ending cycle.
Cam blinked several times, eyes growing wide suddenly in shock as he realised he was not where he had been before.
He rolled onto his back, staring up at a clear blue sky. Cam sat bolt upright, rising to his feet swiftly and turning slowly in a full circle on the spot.
The place he was now was unlike any place he had seen before, unlike the city he had just left.

The beach had found himself on was not a natural one as he had assumed, but one artificially built. The sand was imported, the water before him was actually a pool, the gentle waves created by a machine at the back of the pool which was surrounded by a concrete wall.
Cam backed away from the water, gazing all around him at the people who went about their business. He thought for a brief moment that he was alone.
Several people were sitting on the sand around him relaxing, several swimming in the water which was shallow, a few watched him, wearing expressions of curiosity and interest.
As Cam raised his head and looked about him at his new environment, studying it further. He found he was in a city, a heavily built city constructed of clockwork and steam.
It was a city unlike one he could possibly have even imagined, and it was like no city he had ever read about in his story books. Even the people here were different.
There were some with dark skin which he had not seen before. There were no such people in his world. There were, Asian, African, Indian, people of every age and origin were all around him. People dressed in the most unusual clothing, some wearing no clothing at all.
Cam watched a couple, man and woman, wade into the pool before him, completely naked, and no one was sparing them a second glance.
Cam turned and strode from the beach, walking up the concrete steps and stepping onto the street.
He saw on the grass nearby a male couple kissing passionately and having sex right there in front of everyone and nobody cared. Next to them a female couple were doing the same.
Cam walked at a hurried pace through the streets, mind whirring at all he saw. This new world he had come to, was far wilder than the one he had just come from, and his mind struggled to comprehend it all.
He saw a man dressed as a woman, if it were not for the beard and the bulge in his tight trousers, Cam would have thought the person *was* a woman. There was a man whose face was half-metal, looking like the skull beneath the skin, a woman who had a mechanical tentacle where her arm should be, a young boy with wings like an angel who could not have been older than seven, passionately kissing a black woman who looked to be in her thirties.
‘What is this place?’ Cam said reaching the edge of the city and leaning over the wall.
His breath was completely stolen away as he realised the sky was below him.
The city was floating. This great piece of the earth was hovering above the land, moving over sea and solid ground alike.
‘What?’ Cam uttered as the wind which was strong here whipped his black hair back. ‘A moving city???’
‘Do you like it?’
Cam whirled around, seeing the masked figure standing before him.
‘I lost you for a moment’ the figure said to him. ‘I took you to another world, but we were split. You weren’t meant to come here.’
Cam tried to speak, but for that moment he was lost for words, and then a girl of about twelve approached him.
‘Hello sir’ she said, you look lost.
Cam could only stare down at her, unable to find words to speak.
She smiled sweetly up at him, tilting her head playfully.

‘I can show you a good time’ the girl said to him, touching his arm and moving closer to him still. ‘I've never seen such a handsome man. I know how to make you feel good.’
Cam shook his head involuntarily at the girl, who was completely ignoring the masked figure beside him, as if she couldn’t see. It was clear that Cam didn’t understand her meaning.
‘Where are you parents?’ he said to her.
‘Dead.’
She pressed her body against his.
‘No’ Cam said pushing her away. ‘I'm not interested.’
The girl looked visibly disappointed, hesitating only for a moment.
She lowered her hand and walked away.
‘What the hell is this?’ Cam uttered. ‘A child prostitute?’ Cam whispered. ‘That’s disgusting.’
‘In this world’ the figure replied, ‘anything goes.’ The figure smiled behind his mask, turning and gliding away. ‘Follow me.
‘Where are you taking me now?’ Cam asked the masked figure.
‘To another world’ the masked figure answered quietly.
The figure cast his hand out, and a great wall of light appeared before them.
Cam swallowed nervously at the sight of it.
‘Is this world going to be scary?’ Cam asked him uncertainly.
‘That world’ the figure turned, smirking to Cam behind his mask, ‘is different from this world we are in now.’
‘When can I go home?’ Cam asked the figure.
‘Not yet’ the masked figure simply replied. ‘You have to learn to control your powers first. You have to be strong’ the figure told him, ‘you have to be mighty. Only then will you be allowed to go home.’
The figure smiled slyly behind his mask again, though Cam could not see, he could hear the amusement clear in his voice.
‘Only the strong make it in this world’ the figure spoke, ‘and in the end…everything dies…’
Cam turned away, clenching his jaw.
‘You miss your brother don’t you?’
‘Of course I do’ Cam mumbled back.
‘Do you want to return to him now?’ the figure suddenly asked him.
Cam’s heart skipped a beat in his chest and he raised his head, eyes wide in hope.
‘If you go back to him now, nothing will have changed. Do you want to return to him the weak frightened man you are now, or one that is mighty?’
Cam clenched his jaw, swallowing the lump in his throat.
‘Do you want to return to him as a broken pawn’ the masked figure continued, ‘or as the king you were meant to be…?’
‘I…’ Cam hesitated, speaking with uncertainty. ‘I want to be strong…’
‘That’s what I thought’ the masked figure finished briskly. ‘You will return when you are ready, and……you will not get another offer to return to him until after this is finished.’
Cam bowed his head.
The masked figure stepped towards the portal. He paused then, turning back to Cam. ‘Are you ready?’

Cam didn't move.
'It's alright' the masked figure smiled behind his plague mask. 'I will be with you this time.'
Cam stared at him for a moment longer, before stepping forwards, determined now.
I must not be afraid.
He stood next to the figure.
'So, you *are* ready?' the masked figure said to him happily.
'I guess I am.'
'Good' the figure replied, turning towards the portal. 'After me?'
He stepped forward, and after a few seconds, Cam followed.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

When the light had faded, Cam blinked several times to clear his vision, his heart tight in his chest at what he might find.
But what he saw was not what he expected.
The world he had come from was a busy world, a crowded and noisy place. But the one he had come to was the complete opposite to what the one before had been.
Cam stepped forwards slowly.
He was in a pine forest, and the sky was dimly lit by the low sun, either rising or setting at this time, he did not know. The air around him was cool.
'It's morning' the masked figure said behind him. 'It should be getting brighter very quickly now.'
Cam listened to everything that was around him. There were little birds singing their sweet songs from the branches in the trees overhead, fluttering about from one perch to the next. Cam did not know any of these songs. He was not familiar with these birds.
The air Cam suddenly noticed, was utterly still.
There was no breeze at all.
'This is a peaceful world?' Cam asked.
The masked figure began to chuckle under his breath.
'No Cam' he said. 'Though it may not look it at first, this is a world that is ravaged by war.'
Cam blinked slowly, turning on the spot as he gazed all around him.
'It's so peaceful here' Cam mumbled. 'But I know this won't last. This is not why you brought me here.' Cam bowed his head then, becoming sombre. 'I wonder what will happen to me here….'
They moved away, walking in silence for a short time until they came to the edge of the forest, seeing a downwards slope opening out onto a vast world. And here, Cam saw of what the masked figure spoke of.
'This is indeed war' Cam thought, speaking aloud as he stared at the level plains below them.

There were perhaps thousands of people there before them, about half of them were dead or dying or injured.
Cam looked closer, examining the people themselves.
They fought with weapons like swords and bows, some of them carried staves, and rode horses slowly through the camp.
'Are those the Generals?' Cam asked, watching these figures closely that were finely dressed.
'Perhaps' the masked figure by his side answered vaguely. 'Perhaps not…'
Cam's attention drifted to the horizon and the structures that were built there, and he saw at a glance that the cities were made of stone.
So Cam thought to himself, *this is an old world.*
'They do not welcome foreigners here' the masked figure told him standing one step behind. 'I would be careful here if I were you.'
'Of course,' Cam said. 'Obviously.'
What awaits me here I wonder…what awaits me here…?
'Many people here live hard lives' the masked figure informed. 'Living through war is not easy, and these are the hardest of days.'
He moved away, turning his back on the open scene before them and gliding back into the woods.
'We are going to a place now, where people need help' the masked figure explained.
'Ok' Cam agreed, speaking lethargically, without caring to ask for further details, though the masked figure offered it anyway.
'We are going to a camp' the figure went on as Cam followed, 'a camp of refugees.'
'What can I do there?'
The masked figure paused, turning to glance back through the large windows that were the eyes of the plague mask. 'Learn' he answered simply, before moving away.
Cam glanced one last time towards the aftermath of the battle behind him, before turning and following after him.

They walked through the woods for several hours in silence, moving at a gentle pace.
'So, you travel to many worlds often?' Cam spoke up after a while, speaking in a dreary tone.
'You want to know more about me, about us?' the masked figure replied, sounding amused.
'Of course I do' Cam said. 'The first time I've ever seen your kind' Cam went on, 'was when I was a child.'
'Auntie' the figure replied. 'I know.'
Cam slowed to a stop then, staring at the masked figure's back. 'I loved her' he said. 'My brother and I both loved her……why did she have to die?'
'Why did your father have to die?' the masked figure retorted, stopping suddenly and turning back to face him. 'Why did that beggar who lived in your world whom you've never met have to die? Why did he have to live such an unfair and hard life? What about that woman who was murdered? Or that child who was beaten to death by her father? It's no use asking these pointless questions about *why bad things happen*. Bad things happen because they happen. It's as simple as that. Gods…whatever form they come in, don't exist to live other people's lives for them. Even *bad things* happen to people who *don't deserve it*. Sometimes good people suffer; sometimes bad people and bad deeds are rewarded. Life is unfair. That's

just the way it is. And a god…whatever form they come in…*will not* interfere in everyone's lives…because each mans' life is his own. Even if he must suffer for it.'
'But you're interfering with my life' Cam argued.
'Because I want to' the figure replied quickly. 'Because *we* want to. Just because we are what you might call gods…who watch over worlds, does not mean we will change things only that are bad and reward only what is good. We do what we want regardless…because we have the power……because we want to.'
'So why do you seem to have such an interest in me?' Cam asked him.
'It's just a coincidence' the masked figure shrugged carelessly. 'You were a prince so you were bound to stand out in your world anyway because of your importance, and the woman you knew as Auntie…who met you by chance…' the masked figure shrugged again. 'She was personally very interested in you and your brother, and so the rest of us began to watch you as well…for years…'
Cam bowed his head, falling silence.
'Auntie was unable to have children of her own' the strange figure replied, speaking in a distant voice. 'When she first met you two…she fell in love, she *adored* you.'
The masked figure fell silent then.
'Do you do that often?' Cam asked him. 'Watch people for years?'
'Yes' the figure replied. 'All the time.' He smirked behind his mask. 'We have our favourites' he admitted slyly.
'How many other worlds are there? Cam asked.
'More than we can count. There are more worlds out there than even *we* know of. A number of worlds greater than we could possibly even imagine. You have no idea what space really is, the infinite cosmos. Even in the most advanced world we have ever visited, there is a limit to how far they can explore the space beyond their world, they are trapped in their pocket of the universe, there is a border that they simply cannot cross.' He grinned then behind his mask, bowing his head, falling silent for a few moments, before continuing. 'Space is mostly empty, even in the most advanced world we have ever visited, sending a human to the nearest star would take many lifetimes.' He turned to face Cam then, the hem of his black cloak swirling around his ankles. 'The world I originally come from…. the world I was born in…. was a wonderful world indeed, a modern world. But even with our technological advancements, we are limited to a hundred billionth of a percent of the observable universe. Let that sink in. There is so much universe that we will never be able to touch, even with all our magic, and that frightens me, but….my body will not age.'
Cam continued to stared at him, as the masked figure put his hand to his chest, falling silent for a time, before lifting his head again.
'I, and others like me, have the incredible luck of existing in the perfect moment in time. And the events in my original life that caused me to be noticed by the one before me, a member of the eight whose place I took, are over one in four quadrillion. I can see so many futures, and the distant pasts. As isolated and remote as many galaxies are, we can perceive the entire universe grand and spectacular, as it is right now. And because I will never age, I have many lifetimes….to explore as much as I can, before I decide to die. Maybe it will be out of boredom, or maybe it will be because I want to find out if there really is a sort of afterlife. Or perhaps there's nothing at all.'

He paused then, tilting his head as he regarded Cam closely.
Cam said nothing, only continued to stare at him.
‘You know’ the masked figure spoke, ‘she really did love you.’
‘I know’ Cam nodded, thinking mournfully of Auntie. ‘I loved her too, my brother also loved her…’
‘I don’t know if this will make you feel any better’ the figure went on, ‘but……we didn’t know it was going to happen…we were all just as shocked at her death as you were.’
The figure turned away silently and continued to walk. Cam raised his head, taking a slow and steady breath, before making his way after him.
They walked through the woods for what must have been about an hour, Cam’s stomach growling as he went.
‘You're hungry?’ the masked figure enquired.
‘You noticed?’ Cam replied flatly. ‘If you have been watching me for all this time as I'm sure you have, then you would know that I have not eaten in over a day…nor have I drunk anything.’ His hand went to his head then as he fought off his weakness. ‘I feel so unwell’ he confessed.
‘We should rest’ the masked figure said.
He waved his gloved hand, and all around them materialised several things.
A burning fire, mats to sleep on and small seats to sit, a pile of food, a pile of wood, and just about everything they might need right about now.
‘Convenient’ Cam said flatly staring at the food, seemingly unsurprised and unfazed, almost as if he had expected the masked figure to have done this eventually.
Cam glanced down, seeing a simple wooden box open by his feet. Inside there was a joint of ham, an assortment of fruit, bread and cheese and biscuits and a skein of water.
He swallowed hungrily, and his stomach growled again.
‘I cannot imagine how hungry and thirsty you must be’ the masked figure said. ‘I has been a very long time since I felt such things….lifetimes in fact.’
The figure sat upon one of the small stools, indicating for Cam to do the same.
Cam sat down on one of the small seats, nothing more than a stool with three stubby legs. Cam immediately reached for the food without invitation and began to eat.
‘Slow down’ the masked figure said sitting opposite him with the fire between then. ‘You will make yourself sick.’
Cam shot him a neutral expression. He didn’t answer, but he listened, eating slower now. He ate a bit of everything, before taking a long deep drink from the skein of water, letting out a heavy sigh. He dropped the skein, which was empty now.
‘Now’ the figure sitting opposite the small fire spoke, ‘you feel better?’
Cam raised his head, blinking wordlessly at the man.
Cam sighed heavily, leaning with an elbow on his knee and rubbing his forehead tiredly.
‘I'm just a plaything for you’ he mumbled, though the man heard him clearly. ‘What do you even want from me?’
It was a rhetorical question, Cam did not expect the figure to answer, and the figure knew, remaining silent. Though Cam suspected the figure was still smiling at him.

Several minutes of silence passed in which the two rested, Cam feeling the ache in his legs from the long walk, wondering if the man opposite him felt the same. For some reason, he doubted it.
Cam raised his head then, leaning forwards on his knees, staring at the figure closely with tired eyes.
'Why do you always wear those masks?'
'It's just like our trademark' the figure shrugged. 'A signature if you will. The writer quite likes them.'
'Why don't you take it off?' Cam suggested casually. 'Or have you something to hide?'
The male figure smiled behind his mask. He raised a gloved hand, touching his fingers to his mask. He pulled the thing from his face.
The figure looked back at Cam as Cam stared, expression level.
Beneath the mask the man was incredibly handsome, almost too handsome. Everything about him was utterly perfect, and his skin was smooth as ceramic, his eyes unnaturally bright, and there was not a single hair out of place.
'Is this what you were expecting?' the masked figure said pulling off his gloves and lowering the black robe down his shoulders.
Beneath his robes he wore similar clothes to the ones Cam had seen the soldiers wearing on the battlefield at the edge of the woods, clothes that were of this world. Dark reds and blacks, the colours the figures riding the horses had worn, were they Generals?
'I don't know what I was expecting' Cam replied flatly as he studied him closely. 'But…' he said looking into the stranger's face, 'you are beautiful…just like Auntie was.'
The stranger smiled in amusement.
'I don't even know your name' Cam realised.
'You don't need to' the stranger told him. 'We barely know who we are anymore, and names are just a label.' He smiled again. 'Some of us are constantly changing our names, changing our faces…we barely even recognise each other sometimes, so I guess it doesn't really matter.'
'Hm.' Cam grumbled turning away.
'You should sleep' the strange suggested. 'You must be exhausted.'
Cam was already moving over to the mat as the figure was speaking.
He lay down, closing his eyes, and was asleep in minutes.
When he woke a long time later, the fire was out, and the stranger was gone.
Cam sat up, glancing about him in alarm, only to realise with shock that he was alone.
He seared for the figure, calling for him, but the figure did not return.
Cam had been left, just as he had feared.
'They are just toying with me' Cam spoke through gritted teeth, moving away from the small camp behind him, heading in the same direction they had been going before, to the refugee camp.
Why does he want me to go there? Cam thought listlessly to himself as he trudged on. Having finished all the food, he had nothing to carry but the clothes on his back.
What will happen to me? Cam thought. *I'm sure I will find out in time…and I doubt it will be pleasant.*

Cam walked for hours, heading in a straight line. It wasn't long before he became thirsty, and hungry as well, but all the food was gone, and there was nothing for him to drink. All that was left, was to keep moving forwards.

Are you watching? He thought bitterly to himself, glancing towards the sky. *Are you watching…?*

The forest seemed to go on, seemed to be never ending. Everything looked the same, and for a time he thought he would never leave the woods, so far he had travelled. But after long last the line of trees broke, and he was free from them once more.

There was an open stretch of land before him, where saw a town on the horizon.

Is this what you wanted me to find?

Cam glanced about him in case he was not alone, in case he saw a masked figure, but he saw no one.

He looked back at the town, gritting his teeth with determination.

This was a foreign world, and he didn't know what he would find. He knew nothing about this place or its people. But like the world he had come from before, the one where ghouls lived, he had learned, and he had thrived.

'I did it once' Cam breathed, 'I can do it again…'

He took a step forwards, leaving the cover of the trees and stepping out onto the open.

He headed towards the town, to see what he could find.

It was a strange town, not unlike the sort he had seen before, but different from the one in the world called the masked figure had called 'bloodsin', and different from the floating city he had seen all too briefly.

The rooftops were made of tiles coloured black and dark red, and appeared to be made of some sort of ceramic, the corners of the rooftops were curled sharply back, with thick black running along the edges.

The buildings themselves were all fairly small and modest, with empty windows and doors that slid to the side the open. Cam slowed to a stop, glancing askance to the building right beside him. He reached out and touched the door, finding it to be made of what felt like very thick paper, and nothing more. Upon the pale brown sheet were thick painted swirls that looked at first to be random, but as Cam stepped back, tilting his head, he saw that they were actually birds, though only vaguely resembled birds. It may have been the sort of thing you saw only in a dream.

Cam turned away from the building, facing ahead again. The road he stood upon was made of stone, the path a winding one.

It was empty here, there was no one else around. But Cam heard a commotion somewhere ahead.

Cam raised his head, becoming a little tense. He took a step forwards.

Rounding the corner, he saw what appeared to be a small group of soldiers shabbily dressed. At their feet was a young woman, dressed in modest and plain clothes, a peasant maybe. She was lying on her front, crawling away desperately in panic, her long black hair a mess.

The soldier standing closest to her kicked her hard in the side and she fell forwards again, clutching at her waist, grimacing and moaning in pain. The soldier shouted something angry to her in a foreign language, kicking her again.
Cam drew back slightly, raising his head, his palms beginning to sweat.
One of the soldiers spotted him then, calling out to him in an angry voice.
'What do you want?! Why do you stare? Mind your own business.'
Cam gritted his teeth, suddenly afraid and uncertain. His attention slid down to the woman on the ground who had stilled now and was watching him with fear in her eyes.
Cam's attention returned to the soldiers that stood around her.
'Leave her' Cam spoke, forcing himself to speak calmly.
'What?' one of the soldiers barked in response.
Cam gritted his teeth, the muscles in his cheek began to twitch.
'Leave her' he hissed, speaking quieter now, only in a whisper. 'Can't you see she's afraid?'
The men regarded Cam for several moments without moving, Cam thought they might turn on him. But then a horn sounded in the distance, and one of the soldiers glanced around.
'We'd better get going' the soldier mumbled to the others beginning to turn away.
The last man lingered for only a few seconds, before following after his comrades.
Cam remained standing where he was until the last man disappeared from sight, letting out a sigh, shoulders slumped.
He stepped forwards to reach the woman.
'Are you alright?' he asked, kneeling before her.
The woman grimaced then as if some other wound pained her. She raised her head, and there was a smile upon her face.
'A stranger came to help me' she sighed. 'That was very kind of you.'
'I couldn't just do nothing' Cam replied, as the woman gingerly rose to her feet.
'Most would have gone about their business' the woman smiled weakly. 'Why is it always that the poor seem to be kinder people?' She seemed to notice Cam's clothes for the first time, looking at his properly now. 'You're a foreigner' she breathed.
'I suppose you could say that.'
The woman stared at him for a moment longer before speaking.
'My name is Lua' the women offered.
'I'm Cameron.' Cam shifted awkwardly then. 'You can just call me Cam.'
'What a strange name you have' the woman mumbled, then she smiled again. 'A foreign name.'
Cam returned the smile awkwardly, before becoming serious again.
'What kind of men beat a woman like that?' Cam glowered, heart still hammering fast in his chest at the thought.
'Men who live in desperate times' Lua replied, 'we are living in times of war.'

They walked together, side by side through the deserted village. It was a small place, and beautiful, but at the same time, felt empty.
At first Lua moved slowly through the streets, sticking close to the buildings, and keeping an eye out.
'You think there will be more soldiers?' Cam asked her tentatively.

‘It’s possible’ she mumbled back, ‘I would rather not be found again by hostiles…’
They came to the edge of the village, and Lua scanned the surrounding area for some time, before stepping out into the open, heading towards the surrounding forests, heading in a different direction from where Cam had come from.
Cam hurried quickly after her without a word, sticking close to her heel.
He felt nervous out in the open, and stuck close to her as they went.
He relaxed slightly when they reached the safety of the trees, concealed from view now, no longer exposed.
‘It’s dangerous through these woods’ the woman was telling him. ‘We have to move quickly.’
‘Where are we going’? Cam asked, hurrying to keep up with her.
‘To my fathers’ the woman answered. ‘He is a rich man. He can help us. But we have to move quickly, we don’t have any supplies and we don’t want to starve.’
‘How far away is it?’ Cam asked, reluctant to hear the answer.
‘Three days if we walk there’ the woman replied.
Cam looked to his feet, feeling a heavy weight inside his heart and mind.
He glanced about him.
What about the camp the masked figure mentioned? Am I heading the right way?
They walked in silence for a short time, until Lua glanced back at Cam.
‘How did you get here?’
Cam faltered. ‘I don’t know how best to explain.’
‘Then don’t’ the woman replied shortly turning away again without slowing her pace. ‘I don’t want to pry…’
Cam raised his head, swallowing the lump in his throat.
They walked onwards, Lua’s footsteps were wide, and Cam struggled to keep up. She was strong and didn’t slow her pace. But after a few hours, even she began to look tired.
The sun was sinking low in the sky.
Lua paused, turning back to Cam.
‘Keep up’ she said to him.
Cam’s legs trembled, and he fell to his knees.
Lua rushed up to him.
‘I'm sorry’ Cam mumbled, bowing his head low and leaning back on his heels. ‘I……I haven’t eaten…I feel so tired…’
‘We’ll rest now’ Lua spoke softly to him, ‘but I'm afraid I don’t have any food for us to eat.’
Cam leaned forwards, reaching a hand out to touch the soft earthy floor.
‘It’s ok…’ he breathed. ‘I just want to rest…’
Gods I’m so hungry…
He lay on his side, rolling over onto his back. He stared up at the canopy of trees overhead, blinking slowly.
‘It will be dark soon’ the woman told him, lying down also, ‘and the nights are cold…’
‘W-what are you doing?’ Cam asked nervously as she shuffled up to him, pressing her body against his.
‘The nights are cold’ she mumbled again, speaking forlorn. ‘We need each other to stay warm.’

Cam tensed slightly, breath caught in his throat as she laid an arm across his chest, nuzzling into his shoulder and closing her eyes.
Cam held his breath nervously, letting out a deep sigh after a time.
He blinked slowly, feeling exhausted, his body weak. It didn't take him long to succumb to sleep, but he woke a short time later, when darkness had fallen.
It wasn't the strange noises in the night, the foreign bird calls that had woken him, but the cold itself.
Cam was brought gradually out of his dreams, opening his eyes to almost total blackness.
He shifted were he lay, feeling his arms and legs had gone numb from the cold. He let out a heavy sigh, his breath as a fog before him.
By his side, huddled closer, Lua shivered violently.
Cam could tell she was awake, and as she clutched at him tighter, he shifted, placing an arm over her, hugging her to him.
'I hope we get there soon' he whispered.
'Yeah' the woman replied quietly. 'Me too.'
'What's going to happen when we get there?' Cam asked.
'Are you worried I'm going to abandon you?' the woman asked him.
Cam didn't answer.
'Don't worry' the woman reassured him. 'I'll look after you in any way I can…for what you did for me earlier, for saving me from those men.' She fell silent again.
'Thank you…' Cam breathed, his lips turning blue.
'It's nothing' she mumbled.
They remained where they were for the longest time, huddled together on the forest floor. It took them hours to get back to sleep, it was hard to do so as the biting cold crept into their bodies, chilling their very bones.
The forest was still, and everything had fallen silent.
Cam clutched the woman close to him, hugging her tightly to him as they tried to sleep.
When they did eventually manage to slip into an uneasy rest, they were abruptly woken by violent hands.

Cam's eyes shot open as he felt his arm being grabbed, his heart hammering in his chest as he was pulled to his feet, shouts were coming from all around him, and for the first few seconds he couldn't comprehend what was happening.
Lua was screaming as she was pulled away by men, away from Cam and out of his line of sight. There were tens of soldiers around them, dressed the same as the ones Cam had seen before. They must have followed them all this way, must have crept up on them.
'Stop!' Cam cried, trying to reach for Lua as she was dragged back. 'Let her go!'
Cam turned just as one of the men stuck him hard over the head with a heavy, blunt object, knocking him out cold.

When he came around some time later, the first thing he felt was pain as his head throbbed. Cam groaned, gritting his teeth in agony. His skull felt heavy.

He furrowed his brow, raising his head gingerly to look about him. He felt his body jolt as the carriage he lay in trundled on, being pulled by horses. He turned his head slowly to the side, blinking wearily as he examined everything around him.
He was in a cage, being pulled along a road. There were other men in the cage with him, but no women, and Lua was not here.
Cam's eyes slid past the men sitting opposite him in the cage as he looked outside.
He saw they were still in the forest, but this time they travelled by road. The road was relatively flat, was relatively straight, and there were many he saw travelling with them. Around the barred carriage that was pulling them along, Cam saw surrounding them armed men riding horses. Cam saw weapons that they wore at their sides, swords and staffs and bows and arrows, but no shields.
His stomach tightened in fear, looking back within the cage again. He realised suddenly then, that his hands were tied behind his back with rope. Cam shifted uncomfortably, gazing across the hay-strewn cell to the other men around him. They were filthy; some were battered and bruised with fresh wounds. They all kept to themselves. Cam for a moment considered speaking to one of them, to ask them where they were being taken, but quickly decided against it.
Instead he sat back against the bars behind him, bowing his head, and waiting, for whatever would happen to him, eyes wide with shock as he stared down at his lap. He was consumed at that point by a fear that was steadily growing inside him. Tears prickled in his eyes, running down his cheeks and dripping into his clothes.
What's going to happen to me….?

Interlude start

The world was bright, though it was night-time, everything around was lit up, strips of light set into the buildings, running along the streets, and bridges made of pure light where people walked, even the clothes the people wore shone with electric lights.
And inside the club, was where it was happening.
Wonderland leant forward in her seat, reaching up onto the stage and slipping several notes into the woman's clothes. Beside her Castello put his arm upon the back of the chair beside him, looking up silently as the women danced before them, the beat of the music was loud all around.
Wonderland clapped and cheered loudly as the dancer extended a leg, perfectly vertical as she grasped the pole beside her, before straightening again.
The dancers were beautifully dressed, their chests bare and wearing skirts made of light, their shoes were made of glass, the heels high, the sole flashing brightly beneath. There were many dancers here, elevated above the heads of the crowd who watched and paid their money for the spectacle.
It was many hours later when Castello and Wonderland went to a private room together with an entertainer. Here they smoked and relaxed, Wonderland's eyes grew wide as the dancer

leant over her, her pupils dilated as the dancer brought the pipe to Wonderland's mouth, allowing her to take a deep breath from it.
Wonderland sighed heavily, slumping back in her seat as the dancer turned towards Castello now, bringing the pipe to him.
They saw many things that night, much of which did not make sense, much of which existed only in each of their minds.
And it was a wonderful night for both of them.

They only left the club the next morning, when the club was closing.
'It's still dark' Castello mumbled looking up.
'It's always dark in this world' Wonderland replied merrily.
She didn't seem to be tired or worn out in any way, it's like the night's experience did not seem to have had an effect on her. Not in any negative way in any case, she was still lively, and not in the least bit hung over, despite how much she had had to drink.
'I love this world' Wonderland breathed, leaning against the rails and staring down at the city below them. 'I love the night, it makes the lights all the more beautiful. This city is a jewel.'
'A fine city indeed' Castello grumbled, making his way past her.
She let go of the railings, dancing after him.
'Where do you get your energy from?' he asked her then.
'Oh, I assure you when I sleep, I sleep well' she replied with a wink.
'I think we should return home' Castello said, stepping out onto a bridge of light.
The path was a gentle arch through the air, the ground of the city below them was several feet below, and the bridge itself was a golden walkway with no barriers either side.
Wonderland teetered dangerously close to the edge, doing so playfully, but Castello was not worried as she was in no danger of falling. She was a fairy, though now her wings were hidden.
They reached the main street again, solid grey stone ground. People walked by, heading in all directions. A strange creature passed them then, a thing that towered high above them, a strange metallic creature. It could not be easily distinguished as an actual living thing or a machine, but it watched them with a steady gaze, hiding intelligence behind its expressionless face.
'Sentinels' Wonderland uttered under her breath, 'I hate those things…they creep me out.'
'They are here for the people's safety' Castello replied.
The strange silver creature moved away, walking on legs like stilts, its short tail swinging, its entire body sheen of silver plates. Its head was narrow, its eyes large and strange metallic whiskers hanging from the tip of its mouth.
'Such peculiar things' Wonderland uttered, before turning away and hurrying after Castello.
The pair a moment later came to a quiet part of the city, a lonely alleyway where they would not be seen. Here Wonderland opened a portal to their own world, a doorway.
Wonderland stepped back happily, indicating Castello to go ahead of her, which he did, and she followed after him.
They vanished from that world, leaving no trace of their presence there behind them, and stepped out again from the portal into their own world.
Lacklustre Paradise.

Castello took a weary step forwards, blinking slowly as he looked ahead.
'You've brought us to the wrong area' he said to Wonderland. 'Don't tell me you are struggling to control your magic.'
'No' Wonderland said simply, moving to stand beside him, 'I'm not, it's as natural and easy to me as breathing.'
'Then why…?'
'Is it not beautiful here?' she said to him, gazing ahead of them.
It was night time around them, and everything in this world was utterly still, utterly perfect.
The clouds in the cosmos above were a perfect dappled pattern of black and purple, the stars shining brightly throughout, and though it was night, almost everything could be clearly seen, by the light of the moon, and the glow that radiated from it.
They stood on a cliff now, the drop of the cliff a single step away was a sheer drop, a perfect wall downwards. And before them, was a great lake, its surface smooth like a mirror, reflecting back the large moon above. The surface of the lake was so still, it was as if it were frozen in time. There was no wind here, not ever, not anywhere in this world, the dark trees also on the horizon were silent and still like statues. There was no life in this world, not even a single insect, for this was a beautiful world, but a dead world.
'Why have you brought us here?' Castello asked Wonderland.
'It's night time here' she replied. 'I love the night.'
'Then come back later' Castello told her, turning away and opening a portal of his own. 'This pretty world will never change.'
'I beg to differ' Wonderland replied as she turned to follow him. 'All good things come to an end, and in the end…*everything* dies. I say we make the most of what we can *when* we can, for we never know when it will die…or when *we* will die.'
'Our death is unlikely' Castello replied before stepping through the portal.
'Still possible' Wonderland uttered, following after him. 'I remember what you told me about the one called *Auntie*.'
They stepped through the portal again, only this time it was day, though they were in the same world.
Before them stood a great edifice, a structure made of white stone. It was massive, with literally thousands of rooms, some of which were colossal. It was a striking building, with an almost celestial, otherworldly feel about it. The very few outsiders who had seen this place for the first time, thought it was the home of god, or whatever gods their culture worshiped or that they believed in. Upon first sight, it took many people's breath away, but for those that lived here, it was just another feature.
Castello trudged up the mighty steps, Wonderland doing a twirl before dancing happily after him and giggling as she went.
They entered the mighty halls, the vast rooms within this building were mostly empty, but even their footsteps were silent as they made their way, it's like the building itself muffled their presence. Like the rest of this world, even within the temple, it was silent.
They came passed the control room briefly, Wonderland's attention drifting momentarily to one of the monitors.
She paused, watching for a moment.
'So, Cam' she said, 'what are you going to do now?'

She turned away, making her way after Castello.
They came to one of the higher rooms, which was empty like so many of the others. There were two single beds here, set far apart from each other.
There was nothing else in the room, just the two beds, which were more like great slaps of white stone, with soft white fabric which was always clean, laid out upon the top, with the head raised to make a pillow. To lie on them, was incredibly comfortable.
'I think I will stay here for a while' Castello mumbled, lying down upon one of the beds and falling silent.
Wonderland smiled silently at him, sitting on her own bed, before turning away and lying down also.
She breathed a heavy sigh and fell asleep.
As they slept, their bodies absorbed magic slowly, magic which constantly radiated from this world, a life-force, energy like the sun.
The longer one of the eight stayed in this world, the more magic they absorbed, and some of them had become very powerful indeed. Magic was collected slightly faster while they slept, though even now, none of them knew why.
This world was still a mystery. Even to the eight.

Interlude end

Cam raised his head tiredly, opening his eyes as he felt the carriage slow to a stop.
He had been dozing where he sat, slipping in and out of an uneasy sleep, teased by his dreams. Now he was fully aware of himself and his surroundings, growing nervous once more of what was about to happen.
He turned his head to look around him, eyes growing wide as he watched the soldiers beyond the bars moving around and shouting, barking orders to one another.
He bowed his head, swallowing the lump in his throat, before looking up again.
Cam saw a place before him, a place that was surrounded by tall wooden fencing, and guarded by small watchtowers at the edges. The figures at the top of these towers were armed with bows and arrows, and where all looking down at the convoy as it passed slowly through the open gates.
Cam's stomach twinged in nervousness as the carriage pulled them forwards, the large gates closing loudly behind them as the guards returned to their stations.
Cam sat on his knees, staring out at the camp around, his hands still bound behind his back, like the other prisoners in the cage with him.
This section of woods, within the fence, was cleared of all trees, and there were small and simple buildings all around them made of wood, small huts with roofs made of leaves and branches.
Cam watched nervously the figures beyond the bars. There were many soldiers here, the same as the ones he had seen before, the same armour and weapons by their side.
Cam feared for a moment the woman he had known all to briefly.

Lua. Where are you? What is the worst they would do to a woman in this world, in times like these…?

The carriage stopped suddenly for a second time, and Cam's head whipped around, eyes wide with panic, thought he fought to control himself. They had approached what looked like a sort of office, there were the basic wooden structures built all around them, an open space in the middle, and people sitting at desks outside, with papers before them.

More shouts were heard around them. Cam drew back sharply as a soldier approached the carriage cell, watching as the soldier unlocked the door and opened it, barking at the prisoners to get out of the carriage.

Cam did not understand the language the soldier spoke, but it was clear what he wanted.

Cam crawled out of the carriage quickly, followed slowly by the other men that came with him.

A soldier nearest Cam shoved him then. He stumbled, walking forwards towards a group of soldiers who waited for the approach of the prisoners.

Cam reached a certain area and was stopped by a soldier that blocked his way.

He was forced to his knees then by guards either side, the old fear at being touched this way instantly burned inside him, and he fought the urge to scream in panic.

Behind him the other prisoners watched mutely. One of the soldiers hastily untied the rope that bound his hands behind his back, pulling Cam's sleeve back on one of his arms and holding his arm across a low table, his skin was bared. The soldier that held him down, pressed all his weight upon Cam's forearm, and he could not move.

Cam's heartbeat began to quicken further in panic as he saw another soldier approach him holding a brand that was red hot.

'No please! Don't!'

He turned his head away just as the soldier pressed the brand against the skin of his forearm. Cam screamed in pain as the metal scorched his flesh, smelling the vile scene of his own burnt skin in his nostrils.

The soldier pulled the brand away after a few seconds, leaving behind the mark.

Cam began to whimper pitifully then as he was hauled to his feet, dragged away by another guard as the prisoner that came after him was forced to kneel before the small table.

As Cam walked away, being led by the soldier, he cradled his arm to him tenderly, feeling the pain fresh and real.

Cam was led by the guard across the camp and away. He was taken indoors and shoved in a cell. One by one, the prisoners that had accompanied him joined him, each of them now sharing the same mark.

Cam sat in the corner of the cell, staring at the skin of his forearm with uncertainty. Burnt there upon the flesh on his right forearm was what looked like an S-shape, but it was twisted and deformed. Cam knew that it would scar and would from that day forever remain. He was now permanently marked in this world as a prisoner.

He hugged his arm to his chest, doing so tenderly so as not to touch the burn. He wondered for a moment what such a thing would mean, to be a prisoner in this world he knew nothing about, and he wondered again what might happen to him.

Will I ever get home at this rate?
Cam closed his eyes mournfully, a tear running down his cheek as he fought back the sobs. He was in a world of his own, nothing else existed to him, until one of the prisoners spoke.
'Who are you?' the stranger asked him.
Cam's eyes shot open, and he looked hastily towards the man. A nondescript figure dressed in tattered clothes.
Cam stared up at the man in shock, his words caught in his throat as his mind went blank, lost for what to say.
'You're a foreigner, aren't you?' the man questioned, in a voice that was not a friendly one.
'What?' Cam fumbled.
'Your clothes' the stranger said, 'they're foreign.'
Oh, my clothes Cam panicked. *Not this again!*
'Where are you from?' the prisoner asked.
What does it matter? Why do you care?
'You wouldn't know the place' Cam forced himself to say, averting his gaze then.
'Smart-mouth, are you?'
'What?'
The man kicked him suddenly without warning hard in the gut. Cam gritted his teeth at the shock as he fought for control, body hunched over and hugging himself.
'Wh-what…?'
'Foreigners are the reason this war began in the first place' the man snarled.
'No' Cam shook his head, gasping in pain. 'I don't know anything about this war…I'm a prisoner like the rest of you…!'
'You are not one of us' the man said, his lips twitching angrily in a snarl, and as Cam looked up, he saw with a sinking feeling, the faces of the other men, and he could see in their eyes… They hated him.
*Even amongst prisoners…*Cam bowed his head, *I am an outcast…?*
The man that has spoken turned and walked away, heading back to the other side of the prison cell. All around, the faces of the other prisoners watched Cam silently, and Cam as he closed his eyes, prayed to the gods of his homeland to be left alone.
Please Ezla……please……
And miraculously, for whatever reason, Cam was left alone as their attention gradually drifted away from him. He was not hurt again that day, and was ignored.
At least for now.
Cam gritted his teeth, letting out a sigh as he bowed his head.
At least for now……

The next day at midday, they were let out of their cells. For several hours they were left to wander aimlessly about the camp, however were constantly watched by the numerous guards that were stationed in the watchtowers and along the fences. Whenever there was a gathering of three or more people one of the guards would approach and break them apart.
Stopping people planning an escape no doubt Cam thought bitterly as he watched this happen for the first time. *I wonder what the punishment is for trying…don't want to find out…*

The three prisoners went their separate ways and the guard returned to his station.
Cam wandered without purpose around the camp for a few hours, feeling evermore hungry with every passing minute. He came to a stop at an unremarkable location, one of the buildings which was situated a little closer to the fence than the rest. Cam sat here in the dirt, leaning back against the wooden structure of the building behind, and staring listlessly out towards the forest beyond the fence. He raised his head at one point, seeing the guard in the watchtower staring at him. Cam held the man's gaze for no more than a few seconds, before looking away.
He let out a sigh, hugging his knees to his chest and resting his forehead upon his folded arms.
He felt tired, so very tired.

It must have been an hour or so later when Cam was jerked awake, woken by the single ring of a bell, its note continuing to resonate through the air. It was a very loud noise, and Cam was tense, staring about him nervously. He looked around the building, seeing the other prisoners heading towards a single building a little larger than the others. One of the guards patrolling the fence called out to Cam then, speaking words he didn't understand and pointing in the direction the other prisoners were heading.
Cam took his meaning clearly, rising to his feet and jogging after the other prisoners.
He slowed as he reached them, walking gradually into the large building, trailing at the back of the crowd as he did.
Cam shot a fearful glance to the guard behind him that had pointed. But the man was already making his way onwards, continuing his patrol along the fence.
Cam looked forward again, scared for what he might find inside the building, but he saw to his relief as he entered, that it was just a dining hall.
Cam let out a sigh, feeling a little foolish for his initial thoughts of sinister things.
Cam stepped forwards mechanically, joining the back of the queue and inching forwards as food was served to the men by bored looking cooks dressed in grey.
Cam stared down at his wooden tray as the tired old man before him spooned some kind of slop into his wooden bowl.
He took the tray and moved off, heading to the nearest empty space on the long bench and sitting, glancing about him briefly before looking down at his so-called food.
He couldn't tell what it was. It didn't smell like anything. He couldn't tell if it was something like porridge, or if it was something made of vegetable, or meat. Whatever it was, it was very bland.
Cam lifted the bowl closer to him, sniffing it tentatively.
He *could* smell something after all he realised, it didn't smell bad, but it didn't smell like anything he was familiar with.
Cam lifted his wooden spoon tentatively. He was very hungry.
But before he could taste the food, the bowl was slapped out of his hands.
Cam wheeled around in his seat, staring up wide-eyed at the man that stood there.
Cam recognised him as one of the men he shared his cell with. The man stood uncomfortably close, looming over him.
'Are you enjoying your meal?' he said.

Cam was unable to answer as he stared mutely up at the man, gasping, lost for words, his blood pressure rising as he became more evermore afraid.
The man grabbed him suddenly by the hair, slamming his face down on the table hard and without warning.
Cam clawed at the wood of the table, eyes wide and heart hammering in his chest as his palms began to sweat.
He groaned as the man's large hand pushed down on his skull painfully, teeth gritted and whimpering.
'We don't like your kind here' the man growled at him, leaning close and whispering dangerously into his ear so that only Cam could hear. 'We don't want to see you again.'
He drew back sharply then, moving off quickly without another word.
Everyone in the hall that had stopped what they were doing to watch relaxed suddenly, and the guards that lined the edges of the hall let go of their weapons, but they had not moved to intervene.
Cam sat up then, fighting back tears as he raised his hand to his head, his head throbbing painfully.
He lowered his hand then, blinking back tears.
He looked to the side, seeing the bowl he had dropped and its contents on the floor. As he stared down at it, he had a sudden urge to get on his hands and knees and lick it up.
No he thought to himself bitterly. *I'm not that hungry yet, I'm not that desperate. Not yet.*

Cam and the rest of the prisoners were returned to their cell as it began to get dark, signalled by the single ring of the bell they began to file slowly into the building.
Cam sat as far away from the others as he could in the crowded cell, avoiding the gaze of the other prisoners, and wishing only to be left alone.
Thankfully nothing happened, and Cam was left in peace to rest, though his sleep was uneasy on the hard floor, with only the bars of the cell to lean against. He constantly slid in and out of an unsteady sleep, caught between the waking world and his dreams.
As the sun began to rise the next day, he became more awake, unable to even attempt to sleep anymore. He watched listlessly as the sky beyond the barred window became ever brighter with every passing minute, and the single ring of the bell when it came, did not alarm Cam, and he filed out of the cell slowly with the others when the guard came to let them out.
After that, he sat in the same spot he did the day before, staring outwards towards the forest through the great fence, with the guard in the watch tower glancing towards him occasionally.
Cam wondered half-heartedly when he would be able to eat, as his stomach began to ache painfully from hunger. The prisoners had only been brought into the dining hall once to eat yesterday; Cam wondered if it would be the same today.
He closed his eyes, feeling tired, feeling weak, feeling sick. He had drunk very little, and hadn't eaten for a long time, and it was beginning to take a toll on his body.
Cam let out a weary groan, resting his head against his knees as he hugged his legs to his chest. He began to doze here where he sat, feeling the weak rays of the sun upon him.
After a time, he began to feel comfortable, happy even. It gradually became warmer as the day wore on, and Cam let out a slow sigh, feeling a little better, having rested, if not for a short time.

He was still ravenously hungry, even more so than before, but now his eyes didn't feel like they were full of sand, and his mind felt just a little more awake.
When the single ring from the bell came, around the same time as it had the day before, Cam was not so alarmed by this sound. He rose to his feet gingerly without thought, walking over to the dining hall where the other prisoners were beginning to gather, in an action that was becoming mechanical.
Cam lined up for his food, last in the queue as he had been the day before, and as the day before, he was interrupted before he could eat, but this time it was worse.
Cam fell to his knees; desperately trying to scoop the food back up into the bowl and eat it.
He was so hungry.
How I have fallen Cam thought briefly before he felt pain.
One of the men from behind grabbed his hair, jerking his head back sharply.
For what felt like the longest time the guards only watched, doing nothing as Cam was beaten by several of the other prisoners.
Cam cried, calling out for help, but for a long time they did nothing.
When the guards did finally step in, they dispersed the prisoners quickly.
Cam was curled into a ball, arms over his head and trembling, sobbing and shaking violently.
He moaned in agony at the fresh pains in his body as one of the guards grabbed him by the arm, pulling him to his feet.
'Stand up!'
Cam fought his weight, rising and forcing himself to do so quickly so as not to face further punishment. His body hunched over in pain.
The guard did not let go of Cam as he dragged him hastily out of the dining hall and back outside. Cam walked quickly, wincing at the pain, tasting blood in his mouth. He was taken back inside, to a dark and small place.
Cam was taken to a solitary place, a single cell in one of the smaller buildings. He was dragged into the cell itself, the thick iron bars rusted. The door was closed behind him, and Cam stood there hunched over, simply standing there for a few moments, gathering himself.
Cam thought he was alone, the guard that had brought him here had left, but there was another one that followed shortly after, this one much younger.
'Here' the man said, offering Cam a fresh bowl full of the strange slop.
Cam glanced down at it, his mind sluggish and confused.
'Go on' the young man prompted. 'I'm sure even you don't remember when you last ate?'
Cam reached for the bowl, taking it tentatively and turning to face the man as he did. He brought the bowl to his lips, tasting the contents.
'It's not that bad' Cam mumbled, sounding surprised.
'Hunger is the best ingredient' the nameless guard replied without a smile. He passed a jug full of water through the bars, it was a large jug, though specially designed to be able to fit through the bars. 'You must be thirsty' the young guard said.
Cam bowed his head then, shoulders wracked with sobs. The guard said nothing as he watched mutely.
'I'm sorry' Cam whispered, 'you are kind…thank you.'

‘I don’t believe in this cruelty’ the guard answered. ‘I don’t believe one should suffer needlessly. He stepped back then. ‘I will do what I can to ease your pain, but to be honest; I doubt you will survive this place.’
Cam raised his head, catching the young soldier’s eye before the man turned and walked out of the room.
Cam heard the door bolted from the outside, and Cam was locked in, protected, and alone.
There were no windows in this place, and what sounds Cam could hear were muffled through the thin wooden walls, beyond the bars of his cage.
Cam sat carefully on the wooden bench within the cell, eating and drinking slowly so as not to make himself sick. He was so hungry, the pain in his stomach was almost too much for him to bear.
It was weakness from lack of food and water that was killing him. If he were to die here, it would not be by the men.
‘Where are you?’ he mumbled to himself, his voice barely more than a whisper. It was the masked figures he addressed now, for he was absolutely certain they were watching him even now, and he was certain they heard him clearly. ‘You were supposed to help me to control my powers’ Cam whispered, still tasting blood in his mouth. ‘What is the purpose of this…. why are you doing this to me…?’
Is this the price I pay for them saving my brother; am I to be their toy, a thing for them to play with until my luck runs out and a die? Cam bowed his head, tears running silently down his cheeks. *I had wished to see my brother again…but if it must be this way…I would rather die and have him live and be happy. I don’t care for myself anymore…*

It was the next day when the door to the building he was imprisoned in opened. At around midday one of the guards entered his cell, Cam drawing back automatically in fear as the soldier closed the door behind him.
He still had an ingrained fear of strangers, though especially men. Since that day when Brioke had first touched him, it had only gotten worse, and his effects upon Cam were still lasting, even after his death. And since being hunted, captured, tortured and sentenced to death in his home world, Cam’s fear had only been heightened, had only been reinforced. Now he mistrusted everyone.
‘Don’t move away’ the soldier ordered him as Cam stared up at the stranger, frozen in shock. ‘Take your shirt off’ the soldier said.
On hearing these words Cam instantly began to cry into his hands. The soldier paused for a moment in confusion and uncertainty, but not for long. He knelt before Cam, using a small scissors to cut away Cam’s shirt away, ignoring Cam as he continued to sob in fear, biting into his fist to try to control himself, tears streaming down his cheeks.
‘You're terrified’ the soldier mumbled as he reached for a cloth and a bowl of water beside him, he had brought these things with him when he entered the cell. ‘You’ve been though something’ the soldier mumbled, continuing to cut Cam’s clothes away.
The soldier soaked the cloth in the water, brushing quickly the dried blood away, and doing so with no tenderness. Cam gritted his teeth, flinching as the soldier moved over the bruises. He worked quickly, washing the blood away hastily; the water in the bowl had turned quickly pink.

‘You will stay here a while’ the soldier said absently, ‘just until you heal enough, though I doubt you will survive for very long.’
The soldier rose to his feet, taking the bowl and the bloodied cloth with him as he went.
‘Here’ he said as another soldier who opened the cell door passed him a bundle of clothes.
‘Put these on’ the soldier said tossing them on the floor before Cam.
Cam glanced up tentatively through teary eyes, but the soldier was already making his way out the door. The door to the cell was locked again, and the guard with the key left, closing the door to the building also. And Cam was alone.
Cam grasped as his chest, his heart beat painfully inside his ribcage.
After a few moments, he looked down at the clothes on the floor of the cell.
He felt exposed without his shirt on, and took the clothes, quickly changing. Clothes from this world. Now he looked a little less foreign, though only a little. He doubted it would help at all. Not now anyway.
Cam sat back, leaning against the bars of his cell and hugging his knees. Blinking slowly, he let out a slow breath, feeling incredibly stressed and anxious. But more than anything, he felt hungry. It was a sensation that was becoming as familiar to him as an old friend, the hot ache in his stomach.

The next day, it was the young soldier that brought him his meal.
‘Why are you doing this?’ Cam asked the man.
The young man hesitated, clearly unsure as to Cam’s meaning.
‘I'm sorry’ Cam mumbled, bowing his head, hand going to his temple. ‘I didn’t mean to speak.’
‘Then what did you mean?’ the young soldier asked him.
‘I'm not going to survive this place…why are you keeping me alive…?’
The soldier smirked humourlessly then, opening the cell door and placing on the floor beside Cam the skein of water and bowl of food.
Cam turned his head to the side slowly towards these things.
‘I don’t know if I'm just prolonging your suffering’ the young soldier told him, ‘but you may yet live.’
‘Tell me about this war’ Cam said to the man.
‘There’s so much to tell, it would take too long.’
‘But why…why do people have to suffer like this…?’
‘Politics’ the young soldier answered simply.
Cam couldn’t help but smile.
Just like home…just like anywhere I guess…
‘If you really don’t know anything about this war’ the soldier said to him, ‘then you must have travelled a very long way.’
‘Yes’ Cam whispered, ‘I have.’
‘Then why did you leave your home to come to this place?’ the soldier asked. ‘These are not pleasant times right now.’
‘It was not by choice’ Cam replied.
The soldier watched him for a moment longer.

‘Where are the women?’ Cam asked suddenly. ‘I was with a woman…Lua was her name…’ he blinked slowly, thinking about her face, barely able to remember her.
‘Was she your wife?’ the man asked.
‘No’ Cam shook his head. ‘I only just met her.’
‘Then why would you care for her?’
Cam didn’t answer, but continued to stare ahead, with eyes out of focus.
‘The women have been taken to a separate camp’ the man replied. ‘Some of them may survive by the time the war is over.’
Cam listened to the young soldier’s words silently, his mind in a daze.
‘You should learn to defend yourself’ the guard said, backing out of the cell. ‘You won’t stay in solitary forever, and when you are returned to the others…well…’
Cam was listless as he heard the guard’s words.
‘They will kill me’ Cam finished. ‘I can’t protect myself against so many…’
The man pursed his lips, dipping his head slightly.
‘I’ve felt pain like that before’ Cam uttered, ‘I…I…’ his hand went to his mouth then, and he suddenly realised for the first time that some of his teeth were broken. Many years ago, when he had been severely beaten by Brioke to the point of near death, he had lost several teeth; these had been replaced by ceramic, but now these were broken too.
Cam lowered his hand, laughing weakly then, tears brimming in his eyes.
The guard left him without another word, and Cam was left to endure the crippling boredom once more.

It was many days later, when Cam was returned to the cell with the other prisoners.
‘I thought we told you we didn’t want to see you again’ one of the prisoners instantly snapped the moment the cell door was locked behind him.
Cam glanced back nervously to the guard behind him, one who had escorted him to this cell. But he was already walking away, clearly not caring what happened to Cam.
Cam swallowed the lump in his throat, turning back to the prisoners before him, showing his hands in submission and pushing himself back against the barred door behind, wishing only to sink through it, only to keep them away from them.
‘I've nowhere to go’ he tried to reason. ‘I'm a prisoner like the rest of you.’
‘You're nothing like us’ one of them hissed, the hatred clear in his voice as he stepped menacingly forwards.
‘I don’t know what you want…’ Cam whispered, beginning to tremble.
One of them lunged for him suddenly without warning, balling his fist and punching him hard in the gut.
Cam doubled over, holding himself.

Without giving him respite, the man that had hit him grabbed his head, forcing it down as he sharply raised his knee up, hitting Cam hard in the face.
Cam collapsed to the floor, holding his bleeding nose with both hands, cowering in a ball and staring in wide-eyed up at the man.
'Please no…' Cam whispered, shaking violently now, his voice barely audible, '…*please leave me*….'

Down the corridor, right around the corner but just out of sight, a guard paused by.
He paused, hearing the sound of a man being beaten, his cries of help echoing down the halls, moans of pain and pleading for his attackers to stop.
He waited for a moment, hearing these sounds, then continued on his way.

Finally, after several minutes, the prisoners backed away from him,
They only stopped, when Cam had truly begun to think that they would kill him.
Why? Cam thought miserably, gritting his teeth through his tears. *Why are they doing this? And where are the masked figures? Why have they abandoned me? Why?*

Cam was taken out of this cell again and returned to solitary confinement.
For many days he stayed here, laying on the uncomfortable wooden bench, it was all he had as a bed. He slowly healed from his injuries, but slowly as the days wore on, he was becoming physically weaker, and the gnaw of hunger in his stomach was constant.
He was let out of solitary confinement after a time, and was instantly set upon again by the other prisoners as he wandered listlessly outside.
'Get away from me' Cam snapped instantly as he saw them approach, backing away sharply from them.
'You don't tell us what to do' one of the men sneered, grabbing Cam's head roughly with both hands. 'You are nothing here' he told him. 'You are nobody.'
He head-butted Cam hard. Cam heard and felt his nose crack.
'Why are you doing this?' he groaned, doubled over as blood seeped down his face between his fingers as he held his nose painfully. 'Why can't you just leave me alone?!'
The only answer came when another prisoner drove his fist hard into Cam's body, striking his kidney hard.
Cam stumbled back, bent doubled over and moaning in pain.
'*Please'* he hissed through gritted teeth, holding his hands submissively up in the air, showing his palms. '*Please stop.'*
But they did not listen.
Cam glanced up in time to see a third man swing at him with a hammer.
Cam's head was jerked around.
He stumbled back, hand going to his mouth where he had been hit.
He spat out blood and teeth.
Cam fell to his knees, glancing fearfully up at the men as they began to surround him.

Another man grabbed him from behind, holding him beneath the arms so he could not free himself. He pulled him to his feet, holding him as the other punched him in the stomach.

Interlude start

'It's not going well for him now is it?' the masked figure Castello said, watching all of this happen on the monitor.
'Should we help?' Isami beside him asked, wearing her mask like he was.
'Naahh' Castello said, waving her away.
'But he could die' Isami told him lazily.
'Of course he could' Castello replied.
She frowned at him in annoyance. 'I thought you were interested in him' she said. 'Weren't you the one who was trying to teach him to master his powers?'
'I'm not the only one' Castello answered back. 'Some of the others are interested in him too. But…' he added, moving away from her, 'he if does die, then we will know that he was not worthy of our attention. Remember…like his mother says…only the strong survive in this world.'
'Where are you going?'
'I'm off to visit my friend' he sang back.
'You mean Vergil?'
'That's the one.'
Isami sighed, turning back to the monitors. 'Vergil spends less and less time in this world' she mumbled to herself, '…I wonder why?'
'Isn't it obvious?' Castello asked, and Isami turned towards him as he spoke, her arms folded before her. 'He has a love outside this world' Castello told.
'It can't just be that…' Isami said.
'That…' Castello said, 'and he is afraid to return…'
Isami tilted her head in curiosity, hearing his words.
'He has an attachment to Cameron' Castello told her. 'He knows we are working to try to release the king's powers…but he cannot stay here to see his suffering…'
'He loves him' Isami said aloud, realising this.
'Yes…' Castello replied, gliding out the room, 'he loves him…'
'Loves…' Isami repeated, 'and yet he gives his heart to so many.'
'That's just how he is' Castello replied. 'He gives a lot of love…and needs to be loved in return…'
A few moments of silence passed.
When Isami turned around, she saw that Castello was gone.
Isami looked back to the monitors before her, glancing at another where a picture appeared.
'The steam punk world' Isami mumbled. She glanced back to the other screen, back to Cam.
'Don't you see?' she said to him, though he could not hear. 'They attack you because you're weak.' She smiled then, reciting the words Cam's mother so often spoke. 'Only the strong

make it in this world…and in the end…. everything dies….' She bowed her head, smiling at that. 'That is certainly true…'

Vergil entered the steam punk world, marching swiftly through the streets, ignoring all the beautiful sights around him as he headed to *that* place.
From the outside it looked like a large cottage, it even had the thatched roof to match, and looked a little out of place amongst the modern buildings around it, but not too out of place. This city after all was born from many different cultures, and its buildings were as different as its people.
Vergil entered without knocking, finding Kai downstairs dusting the shelves of the dresser in the beautiful, old-fashioned styled room.
He grinned widely as Vergil approached.
'Vergil' he said. 'What a nice surprise.'
'I couldn't resist coming here' Vergil told him, striding right up to him and kissing him deeply without pause.
'Hold on' Kai gasped, pushing him away to draw breath.
'No' Vergil said before kissing him again. 'I cannot. I cannot resist you. I *have* to have you.'
Kai flinched as Vergil's hand slipped into his trousers.
'Not here' Kai told him.
'Why?' Vergil asked, nuzzling into his neck and nibbling his ear. 'The master is out, isn't he? He's not going to know unless you tell.'
Kai watched him closely as Vergil continued to caress him between the legs, he began to swell down there.
'I want you now' Vergil told him.
'Right now?'
Vergil drew back slightly, gazing into Kai's deep eyes.
'Turn around' he told him.
Kai drew a deep breath. Vergil could feel as he touched his chest, his heartbeat quicken.
Kai turned, and Vergil pressed his hand upon his back, forcing him down upon the dresser as he pulled his trousers down, unzipping his own. Kai rested on his front as Vergil began to touch him.
Kai moaned suddenly, throwing his head back as Vergil thrust into him.
He began to laugh as Vergil pushed into him again and again, doing so forcefully and moaning in pleasure as the ornaments from the dresser rocked back and forth, some of which toppling over, falling from their place.

It was sometime later that Castello found him, barging into the room without knocking.
'How many times…?' Vergil groaned, leaning over Kai on the bed, both completely naked.
'I need your help in the phantom world, the elves have awarded you a special honour…'
Vergil hesitated, glancing back to Kai beneath him.
'Give me ten minutes' Vergil said, caressing Kai's cheek tenderly, 'and I'll be with you.'
'I'll wait outside' Castello sighed. 'Don't be too long…. you'll miss the ceremony.'
'Ten minutes' Vergil repeated, and then his attention was focused on Kai and nothing else.

Castello waited outside the room patiently, hearing the moans and groans and the creaks of the bed coming from inside the room.

‘He’ll be resting for a while’ Vergil said to Castello a few minutes later, closing the door after him with a smile. ‘I think he’s very worn out.’
Castello frowned at him, raising an eyebrow.
‘Alright’ he said to Vergil. ‘Let’s go…’

Interlude end

Cam sat hunched against the wall of the building behind him.
When at last the others had left him, he had crawled over here to be alone, to be unnoticed, and to get away from it all as best he could.
The bell began to ring, the bell to signal all of the prisoners to return to their cell. Failure to answer would result in severe punishment, but Cam was in so much pain, he could not bring himself to even stand.
Several minutes passed as the world outside the huts gradually began to fall silent, to fall dark. Now he was the only prisoner still left out here.
It wasn’t long before the guards began to search for him. One approached him now, striding forwards with a furious glare upon his face.
He stopped before Cam, a towering hunk of armour he was, taller than the other guards; he was an imposing sight as he loomed over him.
‘Get up’ he barked.
When Cam didn’t listen, he spoke again.
‘I said *get up*!’ he ordered, grabbing Cam roughly by the upper arm and pulling him to his feet.
Cam groaned at the pain in his body as he moved, feeling it blossom fresh all over him, throbbing and aching.
He was shoved forwards and made to walk, hunched over, he shuffled forwards, holding his arm close to his chest as he went.
Cam stumbled at the pain in his leg, straightening slightly as he continued.
‘Not there!’ the guard snapped at him as he made to head back to his cell. ‘You're going over there’ he pointed to another building on the other side of the camp.
Cam hesitated for only a split second, knowing the guard would not treat him kindly if he were to linger for much longer.
He went to this building, walking swiftly and listening to the footsteps of the guard who followed right behind him.
Cam approached the front of the building, and with no instruction to stop, and not wanting to anger the guard, he simply walked into the building and continued.
The guard followed after him.

Cam at a brief glance could see this building was different from the others. It was nice. Not like the dark buildings filled with cells he had come from. This was a comfortable building inside, with carpets and pictures on the walls and soft furniture.
'Come to me with more problems eh?' spoke a man within the room.
The guard following Cam grabbed him by the arm suddenly to stop him, turning him towards the figure that had spoken.
Cam looked at him, only just about able to see through his swelling eye.
The man that stood before him was mature, but not old. Slender and handsome with long hair flowing down his back. He dressed well, and as he stood before Cam, was pouring himself some liquid from a cut-glass bottle. The deep red colour of the liquid made it look like some sort of wine.
'Dear oh dear' the man said as he turned around, getting a closer look at Cam now as he stood hunched and holding his injuries. 'It certainly looks like you've seen better days.' He put the glass down and approached Cam.
Cam flinched as the man touched his chin, lifting his head up to look into his face.
'The others don't like you I presume? You can speak' he added, when Cam said nothing.
'N-no' Cam replied, bowing his head quickly as the man let go of him, averting his eyes.
'Because you're a foreigner I presume' the slender man replied. He spoke to the guard behind him. 'Take him to solitary confinement' he told him. 'He needs to stay there until his injures have healed.'

'You're causing trouble by being a target you know' the guard said to him as he led Cam away now. 'This is your fault; they attack you because you are weak.'
Cam said nothing, able to think and feel only pain through his misery.
He was not taken to the cell he had been before, but this time to a cage outside. No shelter, not even a bed.
At the very least… Cam thought miserably to himself as the barred door was closed behind him, *I will be safe.*
He heard thunder rumbling in the distance, and turned with a sinking feeling in his heart, seeing heavy black clouds rolling overhead.

That night, it rained.
It was a dark night, the rainclouds blotting out all the light from the moon, and as Cam lay on his side in the mud, he shivered violently.
This is horrible he thought to himself. *So horrible. I've never felt so cold in my life…*
He slept not a wink that night, and by the time morning came, he was utterly exhausted.

He slept as the sun began to rise, its warm touch drying his clothes, very slowly warming his body up.
He was woken abruptly sometime later by the other prisoners who banged on his cell door.
'We're going to get you' they threatened. 'As soon as you're out of here and back with us, we're going to get you…'
Cam said nothing, watching fearfully as they moved off again.
A short while later, food and water was brought for him.

Cam drank the water quickly and ate the food quickly. He was swiftly becoming used to this food. Whatever it was.
He was quickly learning that you would eat anything if you were hungry enough. Anything at all. In order to survive.

He stayed outside in this cage for a month, never allowed to leave before that time, and existing in all the elements. The cold nights, the rain, the hot and humid days.
Living in squalor was becoming normal to him, and he was forgetting the days when life was different.
This was all he knew now, and his memories of living in a palace and sleeping on a soft bed and eating good food every day, began to feel almost like a dream. Even the days where he had a simple roof over his head felt so far away.
This was his life now it seemed. *Perhaps forever*, he feared. *Maybe I will never escape this world…maybe I must wait until this dreadful war is over…or maybe I will just die…*

For some time, Cam kept his attention out for the young guard, this man had been kinder to him, and he wished only for company, for someone to talk to, anyone. But Cam never saw him again, thinking perhaps that the man had been transferred to another prison, or had left on other business.
The next time Cam was set free from his cell, the prisoners found him again, but this time, they did not beat him.
They surrounded him, backing him against the wall.
'Don't resist' the man that held him snarled, 'or it will be worse for you.'
'What?' Cam breathed, heart constricted in his chest and stomach twisting.
The man touched Cam's crotch then, grasping tightly, and Cam gasped in shock, realising, though daring to hope it was not so.
'Please no I'm begging you!'
The man swung his arm, smacking the hard bone of his elbow again Cam's cheek, Cam feeling hot pain instantly.
He was shoved to the ground; the man grasped the top of Cam's trousers with both hands.
'Help me!' Cam sobbed openly, 'the eight, where are you?! Please don't let this happen to me again!'
But they did not come.
The guard in the tower looking over the scene, turned away then, looking instead towards the forest.
What happened to Cam then was much worse than anything Brioke had ever done to him, to be used in such a way, by so many. All of them had their turn, sometimes two at a time. And Cam sobbed and cried and begged half-heartedly to make it stop, to be left alone, right before they penetrated him again. And Cam continued to bleed.
It seemed to go on forever, but eventually, the last man threw Cam down into the dirt, buttoning up his breeches again.

The group moved away, leaving Cam there, silent and in shock. Now, he wasn't even crying, but felt numb, empty, out of his own body, like he was another being watching himself from a distance, a dead person. A nothing and a nobody.
For the longest time Cam didn't move, until he heard a voice.
The masked figure that sat on the ground a short distance away read from an open book, doing so from behind the mask.
'Apparently studies show that victims of domestic violence are more likely to be targeted again…hu…how about that?'
Cam pushed himself up slowly, pulling his trousers back up with shaking hands.
He wretched then, spitting and coughing, before falling silent, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.
He had his back to the masked figure and was ignoring what the figure said.
'Cam?' the male figure spoke. 'Are you alright?'
'Just kill me…' Cam whispered.
'But what about your brother?' the male figure asked casually.
Cam bowed his head, hand going to his head. He felt sick, consumed by a strong sense of unreality.
'Just kill me' he whispered again, his mouth tasting revolting, '…kill me…'
'No Cam' the male masked figure spoke firmly, putting his book away. 'We didn't intend for this to happen, but we didn't act to stop it either. You need to learn to protect yourself. We can all sense the extent of the power locked away inside you, it is substantial. But it's trapped there. Something needs to happen…something needs to be done to release it.'
'This…?' Cam uttered.
'Whatever is necessary' the masked figure replied without emotion, without sympathy.
'Why is this happening to me?' Cam whispered.
'I told you. Studies show that victims of domestic violence…'
'SHUT UP!'
The figure fell quickly silent.
'Is my brother safe?' Cam asked quietly then. 'Tell me the truth.'
'He is safe' the figure replied, staring down at Cam from behind the plague-mask. 'He is happy. I swear on my very existence that is the truth.'
Cam said nothing.
The figure rose, moving away.
'I should get going.'
'Am I going to die here?' Cam voiced suddenly. 'Will I ever return home?'
'That depends entirely on you' the figure replied.
'I want to see my brother…' Cam mumbled, his body completely drained and numb.
'Keep that goal in mind' the masked figure replied. 'Use it to make you strong.'
Several minutes passed. When Cam glanced around, eyes red, he saw with no surprise, that the masked figure was gone.
I can't take much more…I can't take much more of this Cam thought to himself, body trembling violently. *This is going to break me…*

The final straw was later that day, when Cam was returned to his cell.

Tired of the endless cycle, he could take no more. As the first man pushed Cam back against the bars of the cell, grasping at his crotch painfully, something inside Cam snapped.
As it had done when Brioke touched him, when Cam's power revealed itself for the first time, Cam's magic erupted, spilling forth from within him.
His magic unfurled in an instant, shooting outwards in uncontrolled rage.
Cam lashed out, killing the man who had grabbed him, and feeling the front of his body instantly soaked by warm liquid.
Blood.
There were shouts of panic within the cell. Cam's magic was out of control, flailing around and killing without direction.
Cam bowed his head, sobbing into his hands as the magic continued to whirl around him, working on its own, directed by his fear and hate, but not directly controlled by him.
He was unaware of anything that was going on around him as the magic acted on its own.
He grew weak suddenly, having used so much magic so quickly. Cam became dizzy, collapsing and falling forwards.
He awoke seconds later, feeling a warm damp sensation soaking into his clothes and touching his skin.
Cam's return to consciousness was gradual. His body felt completely drained of energy.
He shifted where he lay, furrowing his brow and groaning.
Cam pushed himself up onto his elbows, gasping in shock at the sight within the cell.
Every single man within the cell was dead, their bodies ripped apart and their insides strewn everywhere. Blood pooled the floor in inches, soaking into Cam's clothes.
Cam gasped again as the cell door opened, the figure of a guard looming over him.
Cam cried out in panic, flinching away from the guard and fighting with him as he bore over Cam.
The guard forcefully held something over Cam's nose and mouth, Cam breathing in the drug-soaked cloth.
His eyes rolled to the back of his head and his body fell limp.
He was asleep in seconds.

He moaned, shifting slightly and feeling instant discomfort in his neck. Cam raised his head, which immediately caused him great pain. He opened his eyes wearily, blinking several times.
The first thing he saw was that he was in a dim room. As his eyes slowly adjusting to the weak light, he saw clearly more of what was around him.
It was a fairly small room; the walls were made of stone. And Cam realised as he tried to shift his body, that he was in a sitting position.
Cam looked down at himself, realising with horror that he was strapped to a chair, and completely immobilised.
He gasped as his heart began to race, looking up feverishly at the room around him again.
The room was lit with only a few torches and was completely bare. He looked down at the wooden chair he was bound to, and saw thick and heavy bars of metal held his arms and legs in place, bolted to the wood of the chair, the chair itself bolted was to the floor. There was no

way for him to get out, and he struggled only for a few seconds, before giving up and accepting his fate.

He sat there for a moment alone and in silence, save for the faint sound of the flickering fires from the torches that hung on the walls.
As Cam looked around again, he realised suddenly that these weren't the same walls as the ones in the buildings of the prisons he had been in, which had been made mostly of wood. These walls were made of stone, and there were no windows. Cam thought for a moment he may be underground.
He stared wide eyed before him, glancing down at himself and seeing his own blood-soaked clothes. The blood from the men he had killed.
He gritted his teeth, choking back a sob and forcing himself to remain in control.
Cam tensed his muscles then, pulling experimentally at his binds one last time. But they were solid.
He would not waste his energy, he knew that it was futile, and so he resigned himself to wait.

The time passed, and Cam listening to his own shaking breath in the still and silent room. He could hear not a sound, save for the faint sound of the torches burn.
His initial shock had worn off, but the fear was still there, as he waited for someone to come for him, as he knew they eventually would. And indeed, as he had expected, the door opened for him, and two figures entered.
Cam stared up at them wide eyed, glancing from one to the other.
They didn't say anything at first, just loomed over him, standing either side like towering columns.
Cam didn't speak. He had thought about it, had even tried to. But his breath had caught in his throat and he couldn't bring himself to form the words. Instead he just swallowed, feeling his throat dry.
'We've brought you to a special facility' one of the men said, eventually speaking. 'Just a short distance from the prisons you were being kept. If we knew you were hiding that much power within you…we would have brought you here sooner.'
Cam didn't understand, the words didn't sink in, he could only stare back in fear.
One of the men flanking him stepped back, pulling from beneath his cloak a pair of pliers.
He knelt before Cam, grabbing his foot. Cam felt the cold touch of the pliers around his toe.
'*What do you want?!*' Cam screamed suddenly at him, before the man could act.
But it his words fell only on deaf ears.
Cam threw his head back and screamed. The man grabbed another toe. Cam glanced down briefly at the man kneeling before him, then at the man still standing beside him.
This is just like last time Cam thought briefly, *in my own world when…before…*
Cam noticed suddenly that each of the men wore the same ring on their right hand. A large flat blue stone with what looked like a rune carved into it.
Cam stared at it, the light from the stone reflected in his eyes.
Cam's skin began to glow, the magic triggered by nothing in particular, it could have been the pain, it could have been seeing the stone.

The light from his skin grew ever brighter in the dim room, his clothes and hair glowing also. The man kneeling before him rose swiftly then and backhanded him hard; the glow from his body instantly vanished, like a candle being blown out. Cam felt suddenly dizzy and sick; his body drained so suddenly, like the magic had been ripped from his body.
He felt the cold hard pain of the ring as the man had struck him. His cheek throbbed in agony. Cam blinked the tears from his eyes, noticing suddenly another figure in the room with them.
'You again' Cam whispered. His distraction was only momentary as the torturer broke another toe.
'It's me again' the masked figure replied calmly.
Cam screamed again, as another toe was broken.

The men eventually left, and Cam was grateful to be alone once more. He sat in his chair with his head hung, the old and familiar fear flooded his body, the adrenaline that had coursed through his veins during the torture was slowly ebbing away.
'You recognise my voice' the female masked figure said to him. 'Don't you.'
'Yes' Cam spoke flatly. 'You're the same masked figure in the room when my brother was tortured' Cam replied, speaking to his lap, his voice was distant and weak.
'That's right' the nameless figure replied in a happy voice, smiling widely behind her plague-mask. 'You remember. I'm so glad.'
Cam gritted his teeth, drawing a shuddering breath, his shoulders wracked with sobs.
'Why?' Cam whispered. 'Why do you just sit there and watch this happen? Do you enjoy seeing me suffer?'
'Enjoyment has nothing to do with it' the female voice replied coldly. 'To create a new structure, one must destroy the old…to make another better…and stronger….'
'Is that what you call this?' Cam began to cry openly then, feeling the blood of the men he had killed upon his skin, drying there and crusting, he had still not been cleaned, and wore their murder upon him. '…I feel so violated' Cam whispered, staring with disgust at his own bloodied clothes.
'Why?' the masked figure asked. 'It was you who killed them.'
'Please' Cam uttered, his body trembling. 'Please help me.'
'The best way to help someone' the masked figure answered, 'is to tell them to help themselves.'
'I'm going to die here.'
'Yes' the figure replied, 'if you allow yourself to do so.'
Cam didn't reply.
'This is a lesson' the figure told him. 'Don't you see? This is the path that will teach you how to control your powers?'
'Through all this pain?'
'If that's what it takes.'
'I did it before' Cam mumbled, lifting his head. 'I killed the man that was hurting my brother…but it was an accident. I don't know how I did it, and don't know how to do it

again.' He turned his head towards the figure. 'How did I do it the first time?' he asked her. 'I've never killed a man before that time...'
'It was because of your brother.' The figure rose to her feet. 'The love you have for your brother is strong' she went on, stepping closer, 'even when you hated him.' She stood over Cam now, looking down upon him. 'He is the one thing in your life you cherish the most. This much I know.'
'I want to live' Cam hissed, staring up at the plague mask, his eyes brimming with tears. 'I want to see my brother again.'
'And you shall' the figure replied, reaching forwards and caressing his cheek. 'But first you must release your powers to their fullest. Only then will you be able to learn how to control them.'
'But before…when I killed that man…'
'Your powers reveal themselves in flashes' the figure explained, 'when your body glows, when you lash out…these abilities could be compared to a child learning how to walk. You do not know yourself yet, you have not mastered your full strength.'
'How do I master my full strength?'
'Overcome your fears.'
'And if I fail?'
'You die.'
Tears ran down his cheeks.
'I don't know how to save myself.'
Behind the mask, the female smiled again. 'Those rings each of them wears' she explained, 'they are absorbing your magic.'
'Then how do I stop them?'
'By being stronger.'
'I don't understand.'
The masked figure drifted away.
'Help me!' Cam called after her. 'Help me. How do I release my power?'
The figure stopped, she heaved a heavy sigh, before turning around to face him again.
'If you cannot work it out for yourself' the woman said, 'then you do not deserve our help. Remember what your mother told you. In this world, as in many worlds……only the strong survive.'
She left him very suddenly, vanishing in a flash of magic. Cam stared desperately at the empty space she had stood seconds before.
There was no way of reaching her now. She had returned to her own world.

The truth was; that even she did not know how to release and control Cam's powers.
But she would never tell him that.

She only returned the next day, when the torturers returned for Cam.
'You see this?' one of the men said to him, lifting something in his hand. 'It's a pit worm. Nasty little parasite.'
Cam stared at the sinuous white worm in terror, seeing the pale spike it bore on one end.
The man suddenly grabbed Cam's head, tilting it to the side and exposing his left ear.

‘You wouldn’t mind giving him a home, would you?’ the man asked, lowering the worm towards his head.
Cam screamed as the worm slithered into his ear.
He fell silent abruptly.
His body tensed; then relaxed, before tensing again, as if he were experiencing electric shocks. He jerked his head to the side unconsciously. The left side of his face twitched repeatedly.
‘You have to applaud them’ the masked figure said casually from the edge of the room. ‘Their torture is…so creative.’
Cam slumped forward in his chair silently, his face hidden by his hair as he bowed his head.
He was still, besides from twitching at intervals.
He threw his head back suddenly, his expression that of mild surprise. His head fell to the side, cheek resting against his right shoulder. The left side of his face twitching violently.
‘That’s enough for today’ one of the men said backing away.
‘We’ll see you again tomorrow’ the other said, grabbing him by the hair and pulling his head back, their faces inches apart. ‘I look forward to it…’

The next day was worse.
His body had adapted to the presence of the foreign body within him. The parasite.
Cam felt the pain of its existence inside his skull, along with the pain inflicted on him by the torturers.
They had broken all of his fingers and toes, and now moved onto other means of inflicting pain.
They had opened a section of flesh at his back, pulling away the flesh piece by piece until they exposed the bone, where they proceeded to carve into the very bone of his shoulder blade itself.
‘It’s very good’ the masked female said casually from behind him, staring at the wound, held open by pins.
‘They’ve written a verse in you.’ She told him. ‘*Fight until the war is done*’ she read. ‘Neat.’
Cam began to cackle then, laughing hysterically as he felt the worm crawl inside his head.
The worm had altered the way he thought at that time. He no longer tried to release his powers, instead concentrated all his effort in keeping it within him, restrained.
And the magic was growing inside him, manifesting. He was only just barely able now to hold it back, but the pressure was building, like a dam about to break.
It would take just one last push, just one, and the barrier would be destroyed.

Cam lifted his head as the torturers returned to him.
‘So’ one of the men said sauntering into the room, ‘what should we do next?’
Cam stared hard at the speaking man, clenching his jaw.
‘You're both cowards’ Cam said to them. ‘You are *nothing*.’
One of the guards snarled, instantly rising to the bait.

He stepped forwards, punching Cam hard in the face with his right hand, his ringed hand. Cam felt the cold hard touch of the blue ring against his skin, taking more of his magic. Cam experienced the same feeling of weakness and fatigue, his head beginning to spin as there was left on his cheek blood where the edges of the ring had cut him.
He began to cackle hysterically, feeling a strange tingling, throbbing sensation at the back of his head, inside his skull.
He fell silent suddenly, raising his head slowly, his hair having grown longer since he left his own world, hanging now over his eyes.
He began to glow. His black hair was lightening until it turned pure white, and his skin glistened like the sun, his clothes too lightened until they had lost almost all their colour.
Cam spoke.
'Die...'
Before him, the two men exploded like bags of water. Blood splattered all the walls, the floor and ceiling. There was little else left of them.
Cam opened his eyes, having closed them to stop blood getting into his eyes; He calmly looked down to the binds around his arms and legs, the metal pieces that held him to the chair.
The metal began to buzz, vibrating at high frequency.
They shattered suddenly, crumbling into tiny pieces.
Cam rose to his feet, wiping the blood from his eyes. He was covered.
His attention turned then to the broken rings on the floor, the blue stone shattered like glass. The magic released from the rings returned to him once more, and despite the torture and hours perhaps even days without food or water, Cam felt stronger, more powerful than he had ever done before.
He felt alive.
Cam breathed in deeply, tasting the blood in the air at the back of his throat. He glowed brighter now, like a celestial being. His glowed so bright, that he appeared only as a silhouette. His hair, skin and clothes were indistinguishable from one another, even his eyes glowed now. He was pure white now.
'That was very impressive. Good job.'
Cam glanced to the masked female who stood beside him, there was not a drop of blood on her.
He looked ahead again, ignoring this figure, and making his way to the door, which crumbled to dust before him, along with the walls either side.
The broken fragments of the wall, the rubble and the shards of the door and the metal of the hinges and lock, swirled in the air behind him, following after him as he made his way forwards.
The building began to break apart around him, and before he reached the end of the corridor, where the door used to be, he felt the touch of the sun, saw the blue sky above him.
He stopped. There were dead bodies all around him, broken men that were killed when Cam tore the building apart. At a distance the caged prisoners stared in shock and disbelief at what they were seeing. But they were too far away to be in danger from him.
There were shouts nearby, guards hollering and running around, shouting orders.

Cam slowly turned his head towards the disruption, seeing a band of men riding towards him from another building some distance away.
Cam's eyes flickered to the ground.
The earth began to shake; great crevasses appeared in the ground, growing away from him. Rolling clouds began to swell in the sky above, black and heavy with rain. The sky began to crack as lighting forked through the clouds. The wind swirled like a hurricane around the prison, as sleet whipped the faces of the men.

When it was all over, Cam stood in the complete silence.
It was quiet, eerily so, the silence ringing on, and Cam gradually returned to his normal appearance.
The prison was like the aftermath of a battle. Fires in some of the distant buildings burned the wooden structures and were beginning to spread.
Cam listened to the ringing in his ears. He stumbled, grasping his forehead, feeling suddenly sick and dizzy, as if he were about to faint.
He had used more magic in this moment than he had ever before in his entire life, many times over. It was a great strain on his body, and he fought hard to stay conscious.
'Don't give up now' the female figure told him, gleaming behind her mask. 'Stay awake. *Fight*…' She tilted her head playfully. 'There are horses tied up at the back of that building' she pointed to a place some distance away. 'Follow the main road north for a few hours, behind the mountains through the woods there is a refugee camp. They will help you there.'
Cam didn't move.
'You'd better hurry' the female figure prompted. 'That wound in your shoulder will begin to fester. If you don't hurry and get help, you will die from infection.'
Cam hunched his shoulders. Suddenly his body felt so weak, fatigued.
'You have to stay alive' the masked female told him. 'Or else you won't see your brother again. You won't see Lucy, or Valery, or anyone you care about.' She smiled slyly again. 'Fight until the war is done' she said. 'It doesn't matter if heaven won't take us back.'
Cam took a step forwards, trudging towards the building where the horses were tied up, he forced himself onwards.

The next few hours were the most painful and gruelling of his life. He fought every second of the way to stay conscious. He felt pain when he was tortured.
This was far worse.

When he did at last pass through the woods, drawing closer to the back of the mountain, he found the camp. He had been travelling for several hours, but to him it had felt like an entire lifetime, every passing second for him was absolute hell and torture.
Cam reached the edge of the camp, and slid from the saddle of his horse, stumbling forwards and slouching in agony towards the men nearest him.
He fell to his knees, crawling towards them.
'Please help me' he whispered. 'Please help me.'
He was barely aware as men ran around, he barely heard the shouts. Two men grabbed him by the arms, pulling him to his feet.

The last thing that Cam knew before he lost consciousness was being dragged into a tent and laid on his front on a bed. He was quickly given a drink, a heavy drug to keep him asleep, and stop him waking up as they worked on him. And then he knew no more.

When Cam woke, he was alone.
He was lying on his front in a bed, the same bed, in a tent, the flaps of the entrance tied back lifted as a gentle breeze drifted in.
The sheets he lay on were soft, and he could feel the cool breeze upon his skin.
Cam blinked several times as his vision began to focus. The next thing he became slowly aware of was noise. There was lots of noise, and as Cam listened, he was able to identify it.
It was the gentle murmur of a crowd. There were people outside the tent, and lots of them.
Cam jerked suddenly, the left side of his face twitched as he felt a throb at the back of his head.
He pushed himself up slowly, gingerly, resting on his knees on the bed as the thin sheet that had covered him slipped down his back.
He stayed where he was for a moment, experiencing his surroundings, trying to make sense of the situation as he wondered where he was. He glanced to the side, expecting to see the masked figure there. He was sure she would be, not wanting to miss an opportunity to taunt him, to test him, to cause him more pain and grief, to push him further. But there was no one there.
He was alone, truly alone, at least for now.
Cam's mind slowly worked. Flashes of memory came to him. The chair. The room. The men. The rings. The light.
He narrowed his eyes as he thought.
Pain.
There was blood, then pure white light.
Cam touched his shoulder, feeling something there. His wound had been bandaged up.
Fight until the war is done.
Cam rose from the bed ever so slowly, straightening as he came to a stand. The tent he had found himself in was large enough for him to do so. He moved incredibly slowly as he walked towards the entrance, bowing slightly as he stepped through the open flap, stepping out into the day.
Here he saw many more tents, and people everywhere around him, hundreds it must have been, possibly even thousands. Smoke from fires trailed up into the sky towards the clouds, and between the tents were the people. They were of every age, men, women, children and old folk, Cam even heard a baby crying in the distance.
What is this place? Cam thought. *What are they all doing here?*
'Ah!' came a voice nearby from a group of men huddled around a fire. 'You're awake! At last.'
Cam's attention slid towards the man that rose from the ground as he stomped over to him.
'Those drugs we gave you were as powerful as they say' the weathered man said jovially. 'You've been asleep for weeks!'

Cam's eyes flickered down. He noted briefly that one of the man's legs below the knee was gone, replaced by a wooden peg. The men around the fire behind him were equally as 'broken'. One had an arm in a sling, another a hole in his head where his eye used to be, another a terrible burn that covered his entire face, the skin raw and blistered and tender-looking.
'Who are all these people?' Cam asked the man in a hoarse voice.
'Victims' the man replied sadly. 'Of war' he clarified, when Cam made no indication that he had understood. When Cam still did not react, he smiled. 'Do you feel any better?'
'I…yes.'
'What happened to you?' the tired man asked him.
The memory flashed in his mind again, the pain and blood and the blinding light that came from himself.
'I came from a prison' Cam answered weakly.
'Ah' the man nodded. 'That explains a lot.'
Cam didn't reply.
'How did you escape?' the man asked him. 'You must have been through quite an ordeal. You were on death's door when you came to us. It's a wonder you were able to travel the distance from the prison to here' he said. 'The journey alone in your condition should have killed you.' The man waited. 'We had to re-break all your fingers and toes and reposition them' the man explained, 'so that they healed properly. You woke briefly to eat, you were starving. But even when you were awake…. the drugs were still heavy and we could barely get a word out of you. You probably don't remember…'
Cam glanced down at himself. He hadn't noticed before, but all of his fingers were bound together by thick white bandages. He was bare-chested, and as Cam stared down at himself, at his own body, he saw how emaciated he had become.
'We did the best we could to fix them. It wasn't easy, but they should heal well.' He paused. 'We have all sorts of folk here at this camp, some of them are healers, some of them are excellent. We had the best come and take a look at you. You were such a mess….'
Cam was hardly listening to the man; his attention instead was drifting about him around the camp, searching a figure in a mask. But he saw nothing.
'Hey' the man said. 'Are you alright?'
'Thank you' Cam replied meekly. 'Thank you…'
The man smiled weakly at that.
'Some of the men that have come here recently have been telling some strange stories' the man went on. 'They said they saw a strange…creature… a being.' When Cam did not react, the man continued. 'They said it looked like an angel, emitting a white light.' He waited for Cam to speak, when he did not, he spoke again. 'Was that you?'
'Yeah' Cam replied reluctantly after a time.
'You're a mage?'
'No……I don't know what I am.'
'There is magic in this world' the man said, 'but no one is as powerful as you, no one is capable of doing what you have done, what people claim to have seen you do. You took apart an entire building' he said in awe, 'you even changed the weather, created a storm. Well…. that's what the stories and rumours are saying anyway, I don't know if I believe it myself….'

Cam glanced at the man silently.
‘Weather Maker’ the man uttered. ‘That’s what you are.’
‘What?’ Cam spoke at last.
‘It’s a good name for you’ he said. ‘Don’t you think?’
‘Hmm.’
‘You know’ the man said. ‘I would very much like to see this power for myself.’
Behind them, the men around the fire all watched eagerly, Cam had realised their conversation had ceased, and they all stared at Cam with excited expectation.
‘I can use my power now’ Cam was saying in a distant voice. ‘I feel different. I feel the magic within me…but…I can’t use it to the same extent as I did before. I feel…drained.’
‘Understandable’ the man nodded. ‘You’ve been through an ordeal most would never have survived, and you’ve come out stronger for it.’
‘Yes…’ Cam mumbled. ‘I suppose I have.’ His left eye twitched as he spoke.
‘So, can we see your magic?’ the man asked hopefully.
Cam thought about it. He didn’t see why he shouldn’t; perhaps it would even do him good.
Without warning, a sudden wind picked up around them. The fire around which the men sat was suddenly extinguished, there was a chill in the air, and sleet began to fall, piling as a wet slush as their feet.
The wind increased, until several tents around them crumpled and blew away.
‘Alright alright!’ the man before him howled, holding his coat tight to him. ‘You’ve made your point!’
Cam decreased his magic, until it was gone altogether. He did this with very little effort, without even moving his body, using only his mind.
A few of the men around them were calling about in confusion, casting glances his way and trying to rescue some of the tents. They didn’t know what was going on.
Cam was able to control it this time, he was able to do what he did without his body glowing.
‘That’s incredible’ the man before him said, patting himself down and straightening his clothes, brushing his scruffy hair back. ‘You really are a mystery’ he chuckled, nodding at Cam. ‘Really incredible indeed…’

A short time later, Cam sat by one of the fires, using his magic to extinguish the fire, and relight it again, over and over, doing so purely out of boredom. The magic was easy to call to him now, it felt so natural, as if he had known this ability all his life. As simple as chewing and swallowing his food. But something didn’t feel quite right. He was able to perform the magic, but it felt sloppy, imprecise, like a child writing for the first time.
‘So, what's your story then?’
Cam lifted his head to the man that had spoken. He had never seen this man before, he was just one of the many that stayed here at this place, one of the braver ones more willing to speak to him.
‘You're not from around here’ the man said. ‘Are you.’
‘No’ Cam mumbled to the fire, before extinguishing it again. ‘I'm not.’
‘You're a foreigner.’
‘You could say that.’
‘Where are you from?’

Cam jerked suddenly, his left arm shooting up without warning.
A long way from here' Cam replied vaguely. 'I can't go home. I'm stuck here.'
The man chuckled at that, and Cam slowly turned his head towards him.
'You and the rest of us' the man replied, turning and walking away.

The next few weeks from then on, Cam lived in the camp amongst the refugees.
It was a hard life, but Cam found that he was strangely happy, of a sort. He took on a lot of the responsibilities of caring for the injured men and women who came to them, people who now were worse off than him, and he helped care for them, as the men before had cared for him.
It was a hard life, and not everyone could be saved.
There was a pit some distance away from the camp, hidden from view by the trees. The children were forbidden from going there, though some still did, and when they returned, they told horror stories of what they saw.
One day Cam went to the pit, following several of the other older men as they carried between them on a stretcher the body of a soldier that had died, his body finally giving out to his injuries. His heart had stopped. His body gave up. It was all too much.
As Cam walking alongside the stretcher, staring down at the body, he felt incredible sadness stirring inside him. This was not the first time he had seen a dead body, but for some reason, this time, it was incredibly hard for him to bear.
He had known this man, had spoken with him, laughed with him. It was thought that he would make it, but overnight…. things had suddenly taken a turn for the worse, and he had died a few hours later.
'We do what we can' one of the men said as they reached the pit, the others around them lowering his body into the pit itself, '…but we cannot save everyone.'
Cam said nothing as he stood at the edge of the pit, staring down at the pile of dead bodies.
They were of every age, even the rotting corpses of a few babies could be seen.
Cam felt nothing as he stared down at what her saw, eyes out of focus and unblinking.
'This war' the man beside him said, his voice breaking then, 'my wife she….' He walked away without finishing his sentence, and the others around him followed, heading back to camp.
Cam stepped back, turning and following after them.
They went back to camp, Cam was offered food, but he found that he could not eat.

Cam continued to stay at this place and was accepted by the people who stayed there with him. They were kind, friendly, some even joked and laughed despite their situation, but Cam now found that he could not share in their humour. He would always turn away, looking at the camp around him, away, towards the horizon, towards the sky. And when they asked him questions about him, about his past, Cam would always brush them off, or reply vaguely.
He would sleep in the same tent every night, his tent, would eat at random times throughout the day, or go hungry, as food was in short supply. He would spend his days caring for the sick, and there was a lot of work to do most of the time, other times he would just sit and watch listlessly, wishing for his books. How he loved and missed his books, back in his own world in the palace there were many libraries filled with many wonderful books, and he felt

lost without them. He would spend many hours every day in the palace reading. Now….he didn't know what to do.

One day, Cam was caring for a young girl who had escaped as her hometown was destroyed, her parents killed, she had come here with no family, accompanied by only a handful of survivors. Some had died after they arrived, due to infection or illness, Cam had accompanied the other men to the pits again several times after that, and had grown to know some of those that had survived. Today, he sat before the young girl, bandaging up her arm with fresh bandages and throwing away the old. She suffered terrible injuries on her arm, and Cam wondered quietly how she had gotten them, though he would never ask.
The girl must have lived through a terrible ordeal, something no child should ever experience.
'They were raiders' the girl spoke suddenly, 'that's what my friend said anyway…'
Cam glanced up at the girl, she could have been no older than eight years.
'He's in that tent over there' the girl said pointing to a tent nearby, as Cam continued to wind the bandage around her arm carefully. 'He is being healed now.'
Later that day, the girl's friend died. Cam took him to the pits, carrying the friend on a stretcher with another man.
At one-point Cam glanced down at the boy, seeing his face.
Rest in peace Cam uttered a silent prayer in his head. *You were too young to die…too young to suffer in such a way……perhaps the afterlife will be kinder…go now…to whatever gods you believe in…*
Cam with the help of the man that accompanied him, threw the boy's body into the pit.
Rich or poor Cam thought, as he saw other figures around him tossing more bodies into the pit, *everyone returns to the earth from whence they came……just like father……..*
Cam turned away and headed back to the camp.

It was a hard life, but Cam felt as if he were doing some good in this world, even if his efforts didn't count for that much in the end, he felt now as if he were worth something. He had purpose in his life again.
'I'm sorry' Cam whispered to the young girl as he returned to the edge of the camp to find her standing there.
The girl said nothing, only staring up at him with a blank expression, perhaps in shock, perhaps in her mind she was in a sense of denial.
Cam could say no more, he drifted past her, heading further into the camp.
Shortly after that, the girl died due to complications, and her body was taken to join her friends.
Cam felt a stab in his heart as her lifeless corpse was dropped into the pits, to join the many others.
After that, Cam left the camp and walked out into the forest alone, travelling far.
He cast his head back, calling out to the sky and the world around him.
'WHERE ARE YOU?!' he called to nothing. 'WHY HAVE YOU LEFT ME HERE?! WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE FOR ME?!'
There came no answer. They did not speak to him. They did not appear. And Cam felt alone, so alone in this world.

He turned, holding himself as he let out a desperate sob, slumped back against the trunk of one of the trees; he allowed his body to slide down, coming to sit on the forest floor.
Cam leant forwards then, hanging his head and hugging his knees. He began to feel truly afraid.
'Just a game' Cam hissed through gritted teeth. 'That's all this is….. and I am just a toy….'

Many more weeks later and Cam's body had fully healed. His fingers and toes no longer pained him, and the wound on his shoulder had healed well also, the scar that remained however would be a constant reminder as to what had been done to him.
Cam stood on the lip of a hill overlooking the camp, the cliff edge a short drop to a rocky fall. He stood here now, looking at the world before him.
Even from here he could hear the constant murmur of voices, and the call of people shouting to one another from opposite ends of the camp, amongst other sounds, the laughs from the men conversing mingled with the cries of pain from the wounded, and the children that played in groups at the end of the camp.
The noise in this camp never stopped, not even at night. People were always awake here, at every hour.

Cam blinked slowly at he stared down before him, the sun was beginning to set in this world, and the day was growing dark.
'Are you ready to move on?'
Cam turned to the figure that stood behind him, recognising the plague-mask and black hooded cloak.
'If that is your plan for me' Cam spoke in a deadpan voice.

Cam stepped through the portal, the white light enveloping his whole body. Cam felt the heat of the magic as he was taken to yet another world. His stomach lurched, and he experienced the sensation of being quickly lifted in the air.
The light faded, and Cam's eyes adjusted.
He briefly saw green lands before him, before realising he was floating several feet in the air.
Cam fell fast, plummeting into the sea below, gasping in shock at the cold water, unable to stop himself, and feeling the water in his lungs.
He fought to swim upwards, breaking the surface, coughing and spluttering and throwing up water. He began to tremble violently in the icy sea, fighting to stay above the surface as his clothes threatened to drag him down.
He took in his surroundings. The land was open and green; the sea he swam in was gentle.
Cam made his way through the water, struggling as his heavy clothes weighed him down. He clambered forwards on his hands and knees, onto the beach which reached far either side of him in a never-ending stretch of sand.
He huffed and heaved, shoulders wracked as he gathered his breath again. He raised his head, staring up at the world around him.
The sky above him was grey, the clouds were grey. This world was bleak.

But there was something about this world that wasn't quite right, something that Cam couldn't quite place at first.
He heaved himself up, twitching violently as he did so. He rose to his feet, straightening his clothes.
He made himself walk forwards, trudging heavily across the beach, his feet sloshing around in his wet boots, as he struggled with every step to reach the other side of the beach.
When he came to the lip of the hill, he stood there, staring out across this new world.
There was a small collection of stone buildings nearby, but it was clear at a glance that they had long since been abandoned. The wooden roofs had collapsed and several of the walls had crumbled. There was nothing else. The land stretched for miles around him, and as Cam stared for several minutes at all he could see, he realised what felt wrong with this world.
There was nothing living here. No people, not a bird in the sky, not even an insect of any sort in the grass or on the sands.
This was a cold world, a dead world.
There was nothing here.
Only him.

Chapter Thirty

Cam wandered this lonely world for days, keeping himself alive by drinking the water from the rivers. But he was starving. There was no food here. He had been raised as a prince, and did not know how to hunt, but he knew how to kill an animal properly and prepare it to eat, having learnt during his time living on the farm. But none of this was any good. There were no animals here, and nothing edible, even the berries he had come across one day he found were poisonous.
He was able to survive this long by drinking water alone, but without food, his condition was deteriorating rapidly, as he walked for miles every day, desperately searching for something that could help him live. But he became weaker as the days wore on, and he suffered terribly from loneliness. He had never realised before how important other people were to him.
Even those just passing by.

He didn't call out to the masked figures. He knew they would only help him if they felt like it. Maybe they would never feel like it. Maybe they had just left him here, and this is where he would die.

Many more days passed, and he became so weak that he could not stand. Emaciated and sick, he was barely even a shadow of his former self now, and his final days in this world were spent lying on a bed in an abandoned home, sleeping, as he waited for death to come to him.

But he was not to die yet. It was not his time. The masked figures that watched over the worlds had in a foolish error simply lost him as he travelled through portals. Some were even relieved that he was still alive.
One of them came to him, entering into the lonely world and seeking him out.
He stood over Cam as he slept on the bed, speaking to him to wake him up.
Cam opened his eyes, but too weak and fatigued he did not respond to the figure, nor to the voice that woke him. He simply lay there, utterly silent and still, save for the occasional twitching, as his body jerked from time to time, as if he were receiving an electric shock.
'Their torture is so creative.'
He was so light, that even *she* could lift him.
The female masked figure carried him outside into the open world again, glancing down at him briefly as she held him, before stepping through the portal before her, and into the next world.
She spoke brief whispered words to him before doing so.
'Stay alive' she had said. 'Stay with me. You didn't survive all this time only to die before you could return home… and see your loved ones again.'

Chapter Thirty-One

She stepped through the portal, carrying him to another world. The room she came to was empty, save for two hospital beds, and nothing more.
As the masked figure carried Cam over to one of the beds, she was seen on camera.

In the control room, Sig leant forward towards the monitor, holding the cigar in his mouth.
'What the hell?!'
'What is it?' his friend Medroc asked calmly, putting his clipboard down and moving over to see what the problem was. 'Woah, what the hell?'
'Who is that?' Sig asked, pointing to the masked figure carrying the seemingly unconscious body.
They watched as the figure lay the body on the bed.
'Who is *that*?' Medroc asked, pointing to the emaciated figure now lying on the hospital bed, 'and why is he being brought here?'
'How should I know?' Sig growled.
He grabbed the speaker from nearby, pulling it over to him and pressing the button before speaking into it. 'Ivan? IVAN!'
'What?' came an equally as angry voice from through the speaker. 'Why are you shouting? You know I never leave my desk.'

‘Ivan. Get to room five now, you’ve got a new patient.’
‘What?’ Ivan’s voice came through the speaker sounding confused.
‘Hey look’ Medroc spoke suddenly, pointing to the monitor. ‘The cloaked figure’s gone.’

Ivan jogged down the corridor. He didn’t usually move this fast unless he had to, which normally meant an emergency, normally involving one of their own men. But this order from central control was so strange.
‘Patients materializing in my ward’ Ivan scoffed. ‘Preposterous. My office is at the entrance of this place, I would have seen something. Nothing can get in without me…’ but when he slowed, coming to the entrance of the room, he indeed saw a body lying on one of the beds.
‘What? But how…?’
Moving swiftly forwards, Ivan approached the strange figure before him.
‘Male…early twenties…. severely malnourished.’ He leaned forwards, narrowing his eyes as he studied the figure. ‘He’s been tortured…?’
The body jerked suddenly, causing Ivan to jump with a start.
‘Gods he’s still alive!’
‘Ivan? Ivan!’
The doctor turned to the sound of his name, glaring with annoyance up at the camera in the corner of the room by the ceiling, the speaker right below it.
‘What can you tell us about him?’ came Sig’s voice through the speaker.
‘He’s been through quite an ordeal’ Ivan spoke levelly in reply, turning back to Cam.
Sig and Medroc watched silently on the monitor in the control room as Ivan leant over Cam, lifting his eyelids before checking for a pulse, then gently try to wake him but to no avail.
‘I’d like to take some x-rays’ Ivan mumbled to himself, as the nurse appeared in the room, standing quietly behind him.
‘What is he?’ she asked.
‘I don’t know Bee’ the doctor replied, ‘I’ve never seen anything like this before.’

Shortly after the X-ray was taken, Ivan and Bee both examined the results. When they saw the X-rays of his skull, what they found there shocked them all.
‘What on earth is that?’ Bee whispered in disbelief as she stared.
‘It looks like’ Ivan mumbled uncertainly, his brow furrowed in concentration ‘…. a worm?’

‘It might be what’s causing the twitching’ Ivan was saying as he approached Cam, who continued to rest peacefully.
Ivan touched Cam gently, turning his head to the side.
‘He still hasn’t woken yet?’ Bee asked cautiously beside him.
‘No.’
Ivan brought out a torch from his pocket, shining it into Cam’s left ear.
‘Oh god’ he whispered. ‘I can see it.’
‘Do you think you can get it?’ Bee asked tentatively, leaning around to have a look.
‘Yeah’ he murmured, reaching into one of his pockets and bringing out long narrow tweezers.

Holding the torch with one hand, he moved the tweezers into Cam's ear, moving forwards carefully, until he grabbed the thing by its tail.
He began to pull it out slowly.
Cam's eyes flew open without warning and he began to scream and thrash around.
'PUT IT BACK!!!'
Ivan and Bee both started in shock as Cam fought.
Ivan dropped the white worm into a metal tray, instantly turning back and grabbing Cam, trying to subdue him. He clamped his hand over Cam's mouth to silence him, pinning him to the bed.
Cam tried to fight back, his eyes wide with terror, but he was too weak to resist, moments after he ceased his efforts, letting out a sob and a whimper of fear, tears welling in his eyes.
Ivan let out a deep breath, slowly removing his hand as Bee too on Cam's other side, let him go, stepping back.
Cam watched them both closely, silent now, his breathing heavy.
'What is your name?' Ivan began, straightening as he stared down at Cam with wide eyes, still feeling shock at what had just happened.
Cam did not answer, only turned away as his eyes began to rove around this new environment.
'Can you understand me?' Ivan asked. 'How did you get here?'
Cam sat up gingerly, pushing himself up off the bed. His hand went to his head as he hunched over.
'What world is this?' Cam mumbled.
'Ah' Ivan said with a satisfied smile. 'He does speak.'
'Did you hear that?' Bee said to Ivan. 'What world?' she spoke to Cam now. 'Are you saying you came from another world?'
Cam lowered his hand, raising his head slowly to look at the woman.
He blinked, simply staring at her, his eyes travelled down as he looked at her whole body, before moving up again to her face.
'I….' Cam uttered, 'I….'
He let out a slow breath, slowly leaning back again against the bed and closing his eyes.
'You need rest, and food no doubt' Ivan spoke up. 'I would very much like to hear your story when you get better…we all would.'
He turned and walked out of the room then, Bee following after in his footsteps.
As Cam turned his head to watch them go, he saw through the door, two more figures standing in the corridor, watching him with interest.
These were Sig and Medroc.
The door closed and Cam heard silence once more, a familiar sensation after visiting the lonely world.
He closed his eyes, and thought only of rest, and nothing else.

The bullets whizzed through the air, ricocheting off the top of the vehicle.
'Come on!' Elaina hollered, leaning out of the large vehicle, holding with one hand onto the bars than ran along the roof.

Across the dark courtyard two figures came their way, a man hunched over and dragging a leg, and the woman that supported him, a woman with muscular arms, despite her slender build.
The man had been shot more than once, and he grimaced in pain at his new injuries as he was supported, stumbling as he went, drops of his blood left behind him.
The man in the driving seat of the vehicle, a man so large in build that he only just about fit, called out suddenly to the man upon the roof.
'I see!' the man on the roof called back, kneeling and staring down the sight of his gun, narrowing his eyes behind his bright pink hair as he aimed towards the two figures stumbling their way, and the creature that was coming up behind them. It was a creature that could only be described as a deformed mass of limbs and tentacles, without even a head, but with a mouth hidden somewhere underneath.
Shot fired, and the creature stumbled back, toppling over and becoming still. The man with pink hair on the roof straightened, reloading his gun quickly and calmly, but there wasn't enough time. He glanced up briefly to see another one of the tentacle creatures lunging towards the two figures.
It was cut down by a figure that appeared behind it suddenly, a slender figure bearing a scythe.
'Ha!' the pink-haired man cried triumphantly as the man with the scythe twirled the weapon in his hand, the metal glowing blue before turning into light and retracting into the flesh of his palm.
The slender figure turned away, looking out one last time as the two figures he protected made it to the vehicle. He turned and ran towards it, as the big man in the driver's seat started the engine, beginning to drive off.
Elaina extended her hand to him as he ran, catching him and pulling him in as the pink haired gunman on the roof cried out in glee, holding onto the bars as they picked up speed.
They sped away along the highway as more monsters of different types appeared on the road either side, but they would not attack now. The group were free and began to celebrate within the vehicle, as the gunman on the roof dangerously began to climb into the vehicle through the open window.
'Hey Magnet' the pink haired man said. 'How are you feeling eh buddy?'
'I've been better' the man on the floor of the vehicle spoke through gritted teeth as he continued to bleed.
'What do you mean?' the pink haired man grinned happily down at him, slapping him roughly on the back. 'This is a normal day for you right?'
The bleeding man groaned at that. 'Watch it pal' he growled.
'Leave him alone' the woman who had carried him snapped at the pink haired man. 'Give him some peace.'
'Will you keep it down back there?!' the large driver called back to them. 'I can't hear myself think.'
'It's ok' Elaina said to the bleeding man, 'we're almost home.'
'Thanks for that save by the way' the bleeding man said to the man who had held the scythe.
'No problem' the slender man replied, sitting back in his seat and folding his arms. 'Happy to be of help.'

Interlude start

Elexis leapt from the rocky cliff, grabbing the rope with a hand and in one smooth movement turning upside down, grasping the rope which ran perfectly vertically from the ground to the ceiling of the cavern, with her legs and sliding downwards. Her pursuers left behind stumbled to a halt at the edge of the cliff, shouting and howling at her in vain.

She looked down at them as she travelled head first towards the ground at all speed, her eyes bright orange showing the hands like that of a clock, ticking around her pupils. Where the numbers on a clock face would have been, on her eye were simple black columns.

Elexis ran her gloved fingers across her face to clear some dirt, smudging slightly the thick orange line of glitter that ran beneath each eye. She turned in the air as she reached closer to the ground, grasping the rope now with her hand as the thick black tendrils of her clothes lifted after her almost like wings.

She let go, landing lightly on the relatively flat ground, pausing only for a moment, before running ahead, moving with the stamina of an athlete.

People in the rocky tunnels around her hurried to get out of her way as Elexis moved forwards. Her way was lit by the many burning lanterns that sat in square glass cases buried in the rock.

She almost made it, almost made it to the exit, when a figure stepped out in front of her suddenly, swinging his arm right into her chest and knocking her back, the breath forced from her body.

The split second it took her to gather herself was too much, and the figure that had stopped her suddenly plunged his hand downwards into her naval, penetrating her body right the way through, flexing his hand inside her body and feeling the bones of her spine scrape against his flesh, cutting his own skin.

Elexis let out a small whimper of pain, tears in her eyes as she realised this was the end for her. But she had mere seconds, and by the time the figure that had stopped her drew his hand back and out of her body, she was already dead.

‘A very good game’ spoke a man sitting on the floor by the wall of the cave, a man with a lantern hanging on the end of a stick behind him, lighting up his features. ‘That was most entertaining’ the stranger continued with a smile.

‘Silence beggar’ the figure standing over the body of Elexis spoke. ‘You are nothing in this world.’

The beggar only leant forwards, smiling silently, and continuing to watch intently.

Interlude end

Cam slept for a long while before waking. Ivan and Bee came to him when he did, seeing him sitting up on the monitors. He raised his head when they entered.
'Hello' Ivan smiled warmly to him. 'How are you feeling?'
Cam stared back at the man, blinking slowly.
'This is a modern world' Cam mumbled.
'Indeed, it is.'
Cam looked away.
'What is your name?'
Cam looked back at him.
'It's Cameron' he uttered. 'But…you can just call me Cam.'
'Is that what you are most comfortable with?' the doctor asked. 'Well my name is Ivan.'
'Are you a healer?'
'Yes, I am' Ivan replied, 'and this is my assistant Bee' Ivan introduced. 'We are here to make you better.'
Cam's eyelids lowered, and he sat back in bed, leaning against the headboard.
'How did you get here?' Ivan asked him.
Cam thought for a moment before answering.
'You would not believe me if I told you.'
Ivan nodded.
'We're going to put a drip in your arm' Ivan told him, as the nurse Bee moved over to one of the metal cupboards by the door, taking out an IV.
'What's going to happen to me?' Cam asked the doctor, as Bee took him by the arm, cleaning a section of his arm ready to put the needle in.
'We're going to look after you' Ivan told him, taking the needle Bee handed him. 'Just rest.'
'What are you going to do to me?'
'We're not going to do anything to you' Ivan replied. 'Except care for you.'
Cam let out a sigh, closing his eyes as Ivan put the needle in his arm.
'This will make you strong again' Ivan said to him, as Bee put the drip on a hook by his bed. 'You need to gain some weight.'
Cam said nothing.
'What happened to you?' Ivan asked suddenly out of the blue. 'The wounds you had on your body…and…that thing in your ear. I've never seen anything like it.'
Cam turned his head slowly towards Ivan again, resting with his left palm facing up, the needle held to place in his arm by medical tape.
'You would not believe me' he said for the second time.
'Why not?'
Cam dipped his head, letting out a heavy sigh. He felt so tired.
'How long was that thing in your ear?' Ivan asked him.
Cam's right hand unconsciously went to his left ear.
'I was……I was…...' he gritted his teeth then, tears coming to his eyes.
'You were tortured' Ivan said to him. 'I have never seen injuries like that in my life. Who did this to you?'
'I doesn't matter' Cam replied, lowering his hand again, 'they are dead now…'

Ivan paused for a moment in thought. ‘You were brought to this place by a figure wearing a plague-mask.’
Cam said nothing.
‘Who was that figure?’ Ivan asked Cam.
‘I don’t know’ Cam replied meekly. ‘I have no idea.’
‘Did that person bring you here by magic?’
Cam tensed slightly, staring at Ivan, seeing him in a different light now.
‘You have magic in this world?’ Cam whispered.
‘In this world?’ Ivan smiled, acting as if he had caught Cam out suddenly. ‘Are you telling me you came from another world?’ He smiled wider, amused at Cam’s surprise. ‘Yes, we have magic in this world, but we cannot travel to other worlds, not yet anyway.’ He stepped back, straightening then and raising his head.
‘Perhaps it was not chance that brought you to us’ Ivan said. ‘You’ve suddenly become very interesting……perhaps you could be of use to us.’
‘Of use?’
‘I wonder who that masked figure was’ Ivan thought aloud, ‘and why they brought you here.’
He turned back to Cam with a glint in his eye.
‘I cannot wait to find out more about you’ he breathed excitedly. ‘You are…so *interesting*….’

They left him alone in the quiet room to rest, and the TV on the wall opposite his bed was turned on for him. He watched the film that was playing with dead eyes, blinking slowly, feeling sluggish. It was a film in which a pale haired woman stood alone in the snowy mountains, she was singing a song, and ice magic was coming from her hands at her will.
Watching from the monitor in the control room, was Sig and Medroc, with Ivan by their side.
Cam was calm now, resting with the drip in his arm feeding him nutrients.
‘What do you think doc?’ Sig asked Ivan.
‘Well’ Ivan said, ‘it’s a strange thing indeed.’
‘I think we should keep him’ Medroc commented. ‘He could be useful, a man who came to us from another world… I wonder what he knows, what abilities he has?’
‘*Supposedly* comes from another world’ Sig corrected. ‘Remember we know nothing about him.’
‘Alright’ Medroc smiled happily, not in the least bit fazed. ‘At the very least we could cut him up for scientific experiments.’
‘Don’t be stupid’ Ivan glared at him, standing there with his arms folded.
‘Well he’s right’ Sig growled, ‘of a sort, we’re not a charity. If he’s not useful to us, we’ve no need keeping him here.’
‘I hardly think it’s a good idea to let him go’ Ivan commented. ‘You saw on camera that masked figure materialize from thin air. At the very least he has a story to tell.’
‘You have a point’ Sig grumbled under his breath. ‘I want him to work for us. Let us see what he can do.’
‘Best to let him recover first’ Ivan politely informed.

Medroc moved closer to the monitor, staring at Cam intently. ‘Still’ he said speaking almost as if to himself, ‘it will be interesting to find out more about him.’
‘In any case’ Ivan said, unfolding his arms, ‘we can’t just expel him. He’ll be alone in this world. He would have nowhere to go.’
‘That wouldn’t be our problem’ Sig replied gruffly, grinning in amusement at this. ‘We’re still not a charity.’
Bee burst into the room suddenly then, looking all flustered.
‘Ivan! Magnet’s team has returned.’
‘And Magnet?’ Ivan asked.
‘He’s been shot.’
‘One of these days that man’s luck will run out’ Sig sighed shaking head as Ivan rushed out of the control room, heading to the hospital wing. ‘One of these days….’

Cam had sat in his room for several hours alone before another figure entered.
The clock ticked loudly on the wall above the door, and Cam found himself wishing that sleep would come, just to pass the time if not anything else. But more than that, he wished for books.
He was just dozing off when the door to his room opened suddenly and an injured man hobbled in, supported on either side by two other men.
Cam watched nervously as the man was carried to the only other bed in the room, the one beside his. He saw the man’s injuries clearly; he saw the blood seeping from his leg.
Cam watched with wide eyes as the injured man was laid on the bed. He was in a lot of pain, moaning through gritted teeth as he was pushed back down.
‘Just keep quiet’ one of the men with him said. ‘You’ll be alright.’
‘Keep fucking quiet mate? I've been shot!’
‘You’ll be fine’ the man said again, ‘it’s not serious.’
‘I'm in fucking agony!’
‘Alright Magnet calm down’ Ivan said as he entered the room. ‘Get me some morphine’ he spoke to one of the men that had carried him, as the other man began to cut Magnets trousers away with a scissors.
Magnet had calmed somewhat, though it was clear he was still in pain and very agitated.
Cam saw past Ivan as he proceeded to inject Magnet with a drug, fresh blood still covered Magnet’s leg.
They worked quickly, in a procedure that seemed to be fairly straight forward. Ivan using pliers pushed his way deep into the wound to retrieve the bullet.
Magnet moaned in pain, gritting his teeth as Ivan worked, but he didn’t complain again.
Ivan pulled away, dropping the bullet into the metal dish nearby with a clang. He began to work quickly on stitching the wound.
‘You're fine’ Ivan said to him a short while later, washing his hands in a bowl of water. ‘You’ll be hobbling for a while though.’
‘Jesus does this mean I'm out of action?’ Magnet complained.
‘You should be grateful you're alive’ Ivan told him sternly. ‘One of these days…’

‘I don’t want to hear it’ Magnet said quickly. ‘If I'm going to die I would rather die young while I'm competent, and I would rather die in action.’
‘Whatever you say’ Ivan mumbled. ‘I'm sorry about this’ he said speaking to Cam now. ‘Magnet spends a lot of time here…that’s how he gets his name.’
‘I don’t feel so good’ Magnet mumbled weakly.
It was seconds later he was throwing up.
‘It’s the morphine’ Ivan said to Cam as he watched silently. ‘I'm sorry about this, we brought him here to stay with you because we want him to help you adjust.’ The sound of Magnet continuing to retch into a cardboard bowl could be heard. ‘He will be unable to go on any missions for a while’ Ivan explained. ‘This is the perfect opportunity for him to show you around.’ Behind Ivan, Magnet wretched again. ‘You will both take time to recover’ Ivan said. ‘After that, you can explore this facility at will.’
‘And what do you want in return?’ Cam asked with a little suspicion and trepidation.
‘Tell us what you know’ Ivan replied simply. ‘Perhaps you can help us in some way.’
Cam bowed his head reluctantly, hesitant to speak. ‘You said that you have magic in this world.’
‘Yes’ Ivan said.
‘I have magic. Cam said, ‘within my body.’
Ivan hesitated.
‘I…I'm supposed to be learning to control my powers’ Cam breathed, ‘I can summon them…but they are still out of control.’
Ivan frowned. ‘Magic exists in this world, but it does not exist within people’s bodies, it exists as an outside source, that can be controlled, and even then, it is limited. Magic in this world is very rare.’
‘As it is in mine’ Cam said. ‘As far as I know, I am the only person in my own world who can wield magic……I am the first.’
‘That is very interesting’ Ivan mused, ‘perhaps you can be of use after all…’

Cam stayed in this place of healing for many weeks, and slowly, day by day, his strength was returning to him. Even simple tasks in the beginning like moving around had been difficult, as his muscles had deteriorated so much. But now, things were becoming easier for him.
Cam stayed with the man known as Magnet in that room, as he healed from the gunshot wound. Magnet left the room often to visit people he knew, though not leaving the area of healing, just his room. Cam on the other hand, felt too weak, but as the days wore on, he felt the strength to wander the corridors also.
He had known from the start that this was a modern world, but it felt very different to the one he has lived in before, the world known as ‘BloodSin’, this world held different sorts of dangers, that he had quickly learned.
The hospital was mostly a quiet place, but there were many people here healing from injury, and one day he saw a person being brought in through the main doors, he was covered in blood, carried on the back of another man who stumbled in calling for help. Cam happened to be near in the time, and he stared in shock as the healers descended on the injured man,

taking him away. It was a few days later, when Cam saw this man again, sitting at a table in the communal area, drinking tea and enjoying a conversation with another injured man. The both of them were smiling.
'He'll be fine now' Magnet said to him as the two of them stood together, glancing over towards the man. 'He will be back in the field again someday.'
Another day, Cam was wandering the silent corridors, feeling very bored, feeling very alone.
It was eerily still in the hallways, until suddenly the door to one of the rooms opened, and Cam stopped in his tracks.
A stretcher was rolled past him, pushed by two silent men walking on either side. The figure lying on the stretcher was covered completely by a white sheet. He was dead.
Cam watched as they passed him by, leaving the hospital wing.
Life is so fragile Cam thought to himself, *and so fleeting…*
He moved on.

Cam became bored very quickly of his surroundings; the hospital wing was small and fairly bland. In his time here, Cam saw several people come and go, and still he remained.
Books were brought for him upon request by Ivan, and he read them intently, read them quickly. He learnt much about this world in a short time from the books alone he was given. They had been taken from the library in the facility, a large place.
'Thank you' Cam said to Ivan one day, handing several books back to him. 'You are very kind to bring these for me every day.'
'It's my pleasure' the doctor replied, taking the books back from him. 'You read these very quickly.'
'I love books' Cam shrugged.
'You're looking a lot better' he smiled suddenly.
'I feel a lot better' Cam replied, monotone.
Ivan hesitated then, watching him closely.
'What do you think of this world?' he asked Cam then.
'I couldn't say. I haven't seen it properly.'
Ivan grinned widely at that. 'You will' he replied, '…soon.'
'You told me before that you want me to work for your organisation' Cam said to Ivan.
'Yes' Ivan replied. 'That's correct. We're not a charity and caring for you isn't cheap.'
'I want to thank you for everything you've done' Cam said to him, 'but I don't know what I could do for you…I'm not a soldier.'
'That's fine' Ivan shook his head. 'We will train you and see what you can do…depending on that will decide what we do with you, you could be just an advisor, working with the machines…or on the front lines.'
'I've never fought before' Cam said. 'Not like that.'
'You could learn' Ivan replied simply. 'Everyone starts with nothing.'
'Learn to fight…' Cam mumbled, 'is that to be my purpose?'
I'm sure they are watching me right now.
'I will do whatever you want of me' Cam said to the man, 'after everything you've done for me, I am in your dept.'
Ivan nodded once with a smile.

‘I'm sure you will not disappoint us’ he said to Cam, ‘I think there is a lot we can learn from each other.’

Cam spent many weeks in the hospital wing alongside Magnet, and when the time came for him to at last leave, he did so with Magnet by his side, who still walked with a slight limp, but was almost fully recovered. The wound no longer caused him too much pain.
‘Dam leg’ Magnet complained as he walked along, ‘if only I could chop off all my limbs and get false ones instead, that would be a lot easier.’
‘Could you do that?’ Cam asked turning to him, frowning at the peculiar thing Magnet had said.
‘Well yeah’ Magnet replied, ‘but I'm afraid it’s very expensive. They would never allow it unless your arm or leg was damaged severely enough to need amputation, but it is possible to create a mechanical arm or leg, perfectly functioning and better than the real thing.’
‘Better?’ Cam questioned.
‘Stronger’ Magnet breathed with excitement. ‘It connects to the nerves in your body and is easy to control…once you get a bit of practice…movement is second nature. It takes a while to get used to the extra weight of the arm or leg…or so I hear…’
Cam listened silently.
‘How strange’ he mumbled after time, voice trailing off. ‘Strange….’
‘I know I'm not supposed to ask you about your past’ Magnet said back to him as they continued to walk, ‘but am I right in thinking that you have never been here at all? I mean…in this world?’
‘No’ Cam replied. ‘I have never been here before, everything here I am seeing for the first time.’
‘I see’ Magnet said facing ahead again. ‘In that case I have a lot to explain.’
They came to the end of the corridor, where there was an elevator.
Cam had never been in one before, and he stepped in cautiously after Magnet, who pressed the appropriate button.
Cam felt a little confused as the doors closed after them, trapping them in the small space together, and then he felt his stomach clench as the lift went upwards.
‘Are you alright?’ Magnet asked of him.
‘Y-yes’ Cam fumbled. ‘I'm fine.’
‘You really are from another world aren’t you?’ Magnet smiled. ‘I guess you’ve never been in one of these before.’
Cam glanced nervously towards Magnet, beginning to sweat a little as the lift continued to ascend. He took a slow and steady breath to calm himself, blinking slowly, before straightening up again.
Relax, everything’s fine. You’re overreacting. You have Magnet to help you…
Beside him Magnet was thoroughly relaxed as he began to whistle a tune.
Cam squeezed his eyes tight shut, gritting his teeth and swallowing.
He opened his eyes, feeling the sensation of the lift slowing to a stop. The lift reached the correct floor and pinged, the doors slowly opening.

Magnet stepped out, and Cam followed suit, noticing immediately that the environment was different. They had travelled to one of the higher levels.
Cam turned to watch as the elevator doors closed behind them, and saw as the lights above lit up, one after another in a horizontal row as the lift was called to another floor, these circular lights were numbered.
'Are you coming?' Magnet asked him, pausing to glance back.
Cam turned away from the elevator silently, following after Magnet as they made their way towards the end of the corridor.
Cam had found the elevator a curious thing, but when he stepped through the doors at the end of this corridor, his breath was completely stolen away.
The first thing that struck him was the size of the place. It was colossal, stretching far back into places unseen, and far in either direction. It was an open place, built like a great city, with wide open streets and buildings all around, and high above them built on tall columns were great rails, along which ran single carriages that ran back and forth. There were taller buildings on the outskirts, and smaller buildings in the centre, all of simple yet appealing design, and positioned so that one could see as far as possible.
Cam stepped forward, jaw open as he gazed all about him in awe.
The buildings, many of which were lacking corners, but were built with rounded edges, were all coloured gentle oranges and yellows. There was no glass in many of the windows, only empty spaces where they could have sat, and as Cam tilted his head back to the ceiling above, he saw that everything below was lit up by an artificial light.
'Everything here is enclosed' Magnet explained as they made their way forwards. 'It's like our own little world within a much larger world. But don't worry, you will get to visit the outside soon enough.' He smiled, amused by Cam's reaction. 'Everyone within this entire facility is part of our organisation.' Magnet tilted his head. 'Our family is a large one…'
As Cam glanced around, he saw that there were many people about him, walking between the fountains and shallows pools situated here and there around the smaller buildings.
Cam saw mostly men, between the ages of twenty and forty. One or two men he saw here and there looked to be older, and amongst them, though there were not many, he saw a few women. And, off in the distance, watched over by what must have been a teacher or guardian of some sorts, was a small group of children, about eight in number, running around and playing. They looked to all be around seven in age.
'What is this place?' Cam uttered, gazing all around him.
'They call this place Paradise Gardens' Magnet smirked. 'Nice name though, right?'
Magnet slowed to a stop then, hands on his hips as he gazed all around him. They stood on a higher level now, a raised platform, and could look down at all that was around them.
'This is a sort of training facility if you like' Magnet explained, 'a sort of school or sanctuary for those who wish for a different life, those who chose to live in a dangerous world.'
'Why would people choose to live in danger?' Cam asked him.
'We are trained as soldiers here' Magnet went on, 'our job is to protect the world from evil. We are a specialised group, few in number across the world. This facility' Magnet said raising his head, 'is one of a number less than ten that exist, and they are spread far and wide and are notoriously hard to find if you don't know where they are. But I will explain that in more detail a bit later. First let me show you around.'

They walked down a straight set of narrow stairs, a short distance coming to the ground level. Magnet led them to a notice board situated at the head of the square. Upon the notice board was a map of the entire place.
'It's huge' Cam mumbled as he gazed at it.
'It sure is' Magnet agreed. 'This is where we are right here' he said pointing to a large red circle on the map. 'This area about here' he said pointing to the middle 'is shops mainly, but it's sort of a mishmash of classrooms and some living quarters also. Most of the living quarters are here' he pointed towards the edges where the tall buildings were. 'They are usually on the higher floors. The classrooms are on the lower floors here, and there are several canteens here' he continued to point, 'here, here and here. We have games rooms where we mainly relax dotted about these places' he continued pointing to various locations. 'There are libraries where you can study, the hospital wings are all built at the edges…but my favourite places are where you train' Magnet said with a gleam. 'They are here' he said pointing, 'at the back. The great hall is at the front' he added as an afterthought. 'That is where we all go if the big man has an important announcement.'
'The big man?' Cam asked.
'Our leader' Magnet replied. 'His name is Sig and he has a bit of a temper.'
Cam lowered his eyes.
'What do you train for?' Cam asked him as they moved off. 'What exactly do you do here?'
'Missions' Magnet answered, 'involving creatures that were originally not of this world. They are like demons, or monsters. You will see them soon enough when we visit the training grounds. You can practice your magic there' he added excitedly. 'I would certainly love to see it.'
'And people in this world can control magic?' Cam asked him.
'Of a sort' Magnet replied. 'We don't hold magic in our bodies naturally like you seem to do, but we have certain magical items that give us specific abilities, but only if we have those items.'
'I see.'
'I am told that you're going to be staying with me and my group for the time being. Everyone who lives here is split into fields depending on their skills, their age and jobs and such, and within that filed they are split into smaller groups within the dormitories.' Magnet thought to himself then. 'Let me see. There are seven in each dormitory, though we all have separate rooms. There's a spare room in our dormitory at the moment. That is where you will be staying.'
'I see' Cam said again.
'You will meet the other members of our group' Magnet told him. 'We are all good friends. We all go on missions together and have been doing so for years…so…we're all pretty close. You know, risking our lives for each other and all that…which we have done…at times…'
'Right.'
'But before that' Magnet said, 'we should get you some new clothes. You can't be wearing those white shirt and trousers forever.'
Cam looked down at himself, and as he did he suddenly realised that he stood out from the crowd that moved around him. In his time living in the hospital wing as he recovered, he had

been given new clothes to wear, comfortable white clothes that hung loosely on his body, and always all in white.
'We should get you some jeans' Magnet thought aloud. 'You'd look great in jeans.'
Cam said nothing. Magnet smirked at him.
'This way' he said. 'Follow me.'
Cam kept pace with Magnet as they made their way along. As they went, Cam admired the scene around him.
Everything was peaceful and tranquil. The people all looked happy and healthy. Not like the people that lived in the streets around his palace home, where there was a mix of very rich and very poor and all those in-between.
Cam remembered the days, oh so long ago now, when he was just a child. The days he and his brother snuck out of the palace to live a second life out on the streets.
The people there were hardened folk. Even the women were used to torment. They learnt suffering early on, as Cam had, and saw violence early on. As Cam had.
But as Cam and Magnet passed the group of children nearby, he saw with slight envy, how carefree they were.
The children smiled one another, laughing happily and talking animatedly.
Cam turned his head sharply away, following in Magnet's footsteps.
They came to some sort of platform.
'This place is quite big' Magnet told him, turning to face him as he leant back against a smaller notice board with his arms crossed. 'We need a tram to get there or else it will take us ages to walk.'
Cam glanced at the notice board Magnet leant against briefly, seeing drawn upon it some sort of time table.
He quickly lost interest.
'It'll be here in about five minutes or so' Magnet told him. 'They come by pretty often.'
He fell silent then, tilting his head back against the notice board and closing his eyes. He began to hum to himself.
Cam turned away. He caught the attention of a woman beside him, standing a short distance away. She looked different, as if not entirely human.
She dressed in tight clothes that covered little of her body. Her skin was tinted blue, and her long hair was an even brighter blue, and tied into a long plate that reached her feet. She had gold rings all over her body, and clawed hands and feet.
She watched him closely, though said nothing. She was utterly silent, her large eyes staring unblinking.
Standing beside her was a man. She hung close to him, like a dog did with their master. The two waited for the tram to arrive, as Cam and Magnet waited also.
'I love this place' Mustang spoke up suddenly. 'I can't imagine living anywhere else.'
'Have you been here long then?' Cam asked him, turning away from this strange woman and the unremarkable man that stood beside her. 'At this facility I mean…?'
'Yeah' Magnet replied, bowing his head, 'near enough all my life in fact. I'm an orphan. My parents both died when I was very young through disease and injury. That's how I came here…' he paused then. 'I would even go so far as to say, that I'm almost grateful. It's terrible I know. I didn't want them to die…but if they hadn't…well…' he shrugged. 'I'm just glad to

be here.' Magnet turned to Cam then, wearing a serious expression. 'Just think…I could have turned out differently…I could have been a doctor…I could have found a wife and had kids…*settled down*…gotten on the property ladder…god forbid…' Magnet shook his head at the thought, shuddering then. 'It was a close call' he sighed, smiling suddenly. 'I am grateful for where I am now.'

'Is everyone an orphan here?' Cam asked him.

'No. Some are and come here at a young age, others come here by choice. It's not an easy decision mind you, after all you are putting your life at risk all the time, but you are doing a good thing, and for many people that is enough of a reason to want to be here.'

'Oh' Cam mumbled, 'I think I understand.'

'If you do choose to come here, well…that is very difficult. It costs a lot of money and you have to pass a lot of exams to be accepted. Out of the ones that come here by choice, only the very best are accepted. The orphans are kept here mainly as a charity. About half leave and never come back when they reach a mature age, the other half end up working for us. More than half would like to stay however, but we keep only the best…like I said.' He cast a sideways glanced towards Cam then. 'You would have no trouble being accepted here. You would be an asset in fact…as long as you use your magic.' Magnet cocked his head at Cam. 'You can control your magic, can't you?'

'Yes, I can' Cam spoke with confidence. 'Well…I can summon it but…' he broke off. 'I'm still learning.'

'Good' Magnet said cheerily, turning away with a satisfied expression. He straightened then, unfolding his arms. 'Here comes the tram.'

Cam saw it approaching from a distance and watched as it slowed to a stop before their platform.

The double doors opened for them, and Cam and Magnet stepped in, followed by the few others that waited on the platform, including the strange blue woman and her companion.

'This won't take long at all' Magnet told him, taking an empty seat.

There were only a few people in the carriage with them, and there was plenty of space for them to sit.

'Relax' Magnet said casually to Cam, patting the seat beside him. 'It's a nice ride.'

Cam eyed the seat suspiciously for a moment, before sitting.

Magnet smirked at him then, crossing his arms and looking away. Cam's attention drifted to the outside world as the tram's doors closed, and the tram began to pick up speed.

Everything was similar in design, and as they went by Cam saw more of the place around them. The wide streets with more of the shallow pools and fountains that accompanied them, the shops and houses, he even saw a brief glimpse of a café, and further on, a small section of grass that looked like a park. There were families gathered here, sitting upon picnic blankets and sharing their food together with smiles.

Cam's attention lingered on them then, and he wondered.

I wonder what it must be like to have a family.

And then he thought of Lucy.

He watched the families closely.

I miss her so much… he thought then. *I want to see her again more than anything…*

He watched the young children running around the park and playing, he saw as one of the children, a pretty young girl, run into her mother's open arms. The mother lifted her child up, hugging her tightly and kissed her cheek.
A flicker of jealously and resentment passed through Cam then.
It must be nice he thought glumly. *I would give almost anything just to have had a normal life. I never wanted to be a prince. I just wanted to be a normal boy……* He furrowed his brow. *I wish I had a mother who loved me, a father who hadn't died when I was so young…*
Everything suddenly went dark then, and Cam gasped, tensing slightly.
'It's alright' Magnet said beside him, speaking quickly. 'It's just a tunnel.'
A few seconds later, and they were out in the open again.
Cam stared up at the bright world around them once more, letting out a sigh and relaxing slightly, leaning back in his seat.
Magnet who watched him closely smirked then.
The tram drew to a gentle stop a few minutes later, and Magnet rose. Cam followed suit.
The double doors opened then, and Magnet and Cam stepped out of the carriage and onto the next platform.
The doors closed behind them, and the tram moved on.
'This way' Magnet waved back at Cam as he moved off. 'It's not far now.'
They walked a short distance, moving through the wide streets, Cam glancing about him as they went.
They were in a different place now, but still within the centre of the facility, and all the buildings still looked the same. It was very bright here.
They walked for only a short time.
'Here we are' Magnet indicated, stopping before one of the shops. It was small in size, behind the large window stood several mannequins dressed in casual clothes. 'After you.'
Cam cast him a brief glance, a little hesitant, before stepping in.
'Hello' the young lady behind the counter grinned as they entered. 'How may I help you?'
'Hello' Magnet waved at her as he entered behind Cam. 'This is Cam' he introduced. 'He needs some new clothes.'
'I see' the woman said turning to him. 'What sort of clothes were you after?'
Cam's stomach twinged in nervousness as he realised that he was suddenly the centre of attention.
He hunched his shoulders uncertainly then, glancing away.
Magnet stepped forward to speak in his place.
'Nothing fancy' he told the lady, 'how about…' he glanced at Cam briefly. 'Jeans and a white shirt and…. a waistcoat.'
'No problem' the woman beamed.

A short while later and Cam had discarded his white hospital clothes. He now wore blue jeans with black boots, a crisp white shirt and a black leather waist coat.
'That's better' Magnet said happily. 'You look great.' He cocked his head. 'How do they feel? Are they comfortable?'
'Yeah' Cam mumbled. 'They feel……familiar.'
They thanked the lady and left the shop, wandering out into the streets again.

‘Now where should we go?’ Magnet pondered aloud. He paused, humming thoughtfully. ‘We should probably return to the dormitories’ Magnet said Cam. ‘You still have the other members of our team to meet.’
‘What sort of people are they?’ Cam asked him, feeling a little trepidation within him.
‘They are good people’ Magnet replied. ‘I would trust all of them with my life.’
Cam bowed his head.
All of a sudden a loud siren began to sound. Cam’s eyes widened as he glanced all around him in alarm.
‘What is that?’ he asked, voice beginning to tremble as the people around him began to all run in the same direction.
‘Relax’ Magnet said waving him away. ‘It’s just a drill.’
‘What is that?’ Cam asked nervously, pointing to a great beast seen running through the streets.
It was large in size, with great backwards curved black horns and shaggy red fur that covered its entire body. Its claws were cruel; its teeth were long, and its eyes gleaming.
‘Oh that?’ Magnet said casually. ‘That’s just nothing.’
‘Nothing?’ Cam said. ‘How can that be nothing?!’
‘Calm down’ Magnet told Cam as he began to shake. ‘We’re perfectly safe.’
The monster was tearing through the streets, roaring and lashing its claws at all the building. It was coming closer towards them.
‘Hey’ Magnet smirked. ‘Watch this.’
He turned towards the beast.’
‘Hey! Yoo-hoo! Over here.’
The beast spotted them.
Cam swallowed nervously, gritting his teeth and stepping back as the beast moved towards them.
‘Hello!’ Magnet waved at the beast as it tore towards them.
‘Magnet?’ Cam said uncertainly. ‘What are you doing?!’
Magnet glanced back at him, smirking.
He turned back towards the beast, arms open wide just as it lunged for him.
The beast sailed through the air, heading right towards him, then passed straight through.
Cam blinked several times, as his mind tried to comprehend what had just happened.
‘It’s a hologram’ Magnet explained turning back to him and ignoring the beast then as it moved on, continuing to roar and snarl. ‘It can’t hurt you.’
The beast howled again, running down the street and away in a random direction.
‘What's a going on?’ Cam asked Magnet, speaking in a weak and feeble voice, body still trembling from shock. ‘I don’t understand.’
‘We hold many dangerous monsters in this facility’ Magnet explained turning to him. ‘We’ve very rarely had an incident, but from time to time we practice these drills, they teach people what they're supposed to do if something *does* happen. You know…just to keep them safe, in case a monster escapes, we’re not all trained fighters here, many are but most are civilians. Office workers and maintenance and shopkeepers and doctors and technicians and I could literally list them all day.’
‘Oh.’

‘If a monster does attack’ Magnet said, ‘the people are expected to flee to certain points within the facility, to free the area for the fighters to eliminate the threat.’
‘Oh’ Cam said again, beginning to relax slightly. ‘I think I understand.’ He frowned to himself them, thinking back. ‘It did look a little strange, like….it wasn’t solid.’
‘A hologram’ Magnet smiled. ‘Made purely of light and nothing else.’
‘Such strange technology’ Cam uttered, lifting his head again. ‘I’ve never seen anything like that before.’
Suddenly there came a crackled and distant voice, causing Cam to give a start.
‘Magnet! *MAGNET*!’
Magnets eyes rolled, and he lifted his wrist, speaking into what looked like a watch, with a large black screen and flashing lights.
‘Yes Sig’ Magnet spoke politely. ‘What can I do for you?’
‘DON’T GIVE ME THAT!’ came the angry voice through the speaker. ‘WHY ARE YOU STILL IN THAT SECTOR?! YOU SHOULD HAVE FLED ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE!’
Magnet sighed wearily.
‘What is that?’ Cam asked him, glancing curiously at the device around his wrist.
‘It’s a tracker’ Magnet said to him. ‘Everyone who works dangerous missions has one, it’s very important and helps us when we get lost or separated. It allows the master to keep track of us…and watch our every step… It even monitors your heartbeat, so they know if someone has died or needs help.’ He paused then. ‘It gets quite annoying sometimes.’
‘Magnet! MAGNEEET!
Magnet raised his head then, spotting a tram travelling on a level below them and heading their way.
He ran to the bridge quickly, taking the device off his wrist and casting it over the bridge just as the tram went by. The tracker landed on the top of the tram, and Sig’s angry voice calling Magnet’s name grew ever more distant.
‘Oh, that’s so much better’ Magnet sighed, rubbing his wrist gratefully.
Cam stepped up behind him. ‘Why does he put up with you if you give him a hard time?’ he asked.
‘Because I'm so good at what I do’ Magnet said bluntly turning to him. ‘I'm an invaluable soldier, and I know it. The work I do here more than covers my hospital bill.’
‘You're hospitalized that much?’
‘Oh yes’ Magnet grinned. ‘Mainly I get shot. That’s why I've been nicknamed Magnet.’ He shrugged then. ‘It’s not intentional though. I'm not the only one at this point who wonders why I've not been killed yet.’
‘Oh.’
‘I do have an actual name’ Magnet told him, ‘but I stopped using that years and years ago.’ He smirked. ‘We should head to the dormitories now’ Magnet said. ‘The others are eager to meet you.’ He turned to face Cam with a smirk. ‘You’ve become sort of a celebrity.’
‘A celebrity?’
‘It was supposed to be a secret’ Magnet told him, ‘but word has gotten out. Only a few people know about you, but you are quiet the curiosity. The people who do know about you are very interested, and my team are very keen to meet you.’

Cam said nothing.
‘Right’ Magnet said merrily, continuing on their way, ‘let’s get going!’

They headed across the facility, walking part of the way, before catching another tram, and walking the rest of the way.
They came to the base of one of the tall buildings at the edge of the open area. Cam tilted his head back to see the top. It reached the very highest point of the facility.
‘This is where the dormitories are’ Magnet explained, ‘some of them anyway. Would you like to follow me in?’
‘Sure’ Cam said flatly.
‘This way.’
They wandered towards a set of double doors which opened automatically as they approached. Inside the entrance hall consisted of a mostly bare and open space. There was a desk on one side against the wall, where there sat a computer and a phone and nothing more, and on the other side was a single plant pot with a bushy fern. At the back was the elevator.
Magnet pushed the button and waited.
A few seconds later and the doors opened. Magnet and Cam stepped in and the doors closed behind them.
Cam felt the motion of the elevator as they were carried higher through the building, Cam watched the numbers above the door as they increased, stopping on the correct floor. They stepped out.
‘Our floor is forty-seven’ Magnet said absentmindedly back to Cam as he moved down the corridor. ‘Remember that or else you’ll get lost.’
Before him Cam saw a large space, a circular room with sofas and a TV and plants and pictures to make the room homelier. There was a kitchen built against one wall, and a round table with seven seats to sit.
‘Each squad gets their own floor’ Magnet was saying. ‘Our numbers are on the doors’ he pointed to the seven doors that led out of the centre room. ‘The room at the end is the bathroom’ he indicated towards the only door with no number. ‘Your room is number six.’
Magnet glanced sideways at Cam. ‘Do you want to take a look?’
Cam hesitated, before moving forwards towards the door with the plaque bearing the number six.
He reached out a hand nervously and grabbed the handle, opening the door and stepping into the room.
Inside the room was medium in size, simple but comfortable. There was a thin carpet on the floor, a single bed, draws and a wardrobe with a tall mirror upon one of the walls, and a large window that let in much light from the facility beyond.
It was a pleasant room, but bare. Cam felt then as if it had just been cleaned. The room smelt fresh, and when he opened the draws he found them completely empty.
‘This is your room’ Magnet said to him from the doorway, watching as Cam took in his basic surroundings. ‘You can do whatever you want in here as long as you don’t destroy or break anything.’ He tilted his head then, regarding Cam closely. ‘You must be tired. Do you want to rest?’

‘I do feel tired’ Cam suddenly realised, hand going to his head as the sensation washed over him. ‘I would like to rest…but…’ he turned to Magnet, ‘what about the others? I thought I was supposed to meet them.’
‘You will’ Magnet nodded. ‘But they’re all out now; they’ll be back in a few hours. Might as well rest until then.’
Cam nodded.
‘I’ll leave you to it then’ Magnet said, straightening up and reaching for the door handle. ‘I’ll come back later when everyone is here. In the meantime, you should stay in this room, and don’t wander off until you're issued with your own tracker. We need to know where you are at all times, especially you. You are such a rare case after all.’
‘Fine’ Cam waved dismissively. ‘Whatever you say.’
‘I’ll come back later’ Magnet said, turning away. He glanced back at Cam one last time, smirking at him before he closed the door. ‘Sweet dreams’ he said to him and left.
The room inside was utterly silent once he had gone, and Cam realised suddenly that there was no clock in his room. In his time spent in the hospital wing, the ticking of the clock on the wall had been a presence so constant; he forgot to notice it altogether. Now, it was the silence that stood out to him, a silence that never seemed to end.
Cam turned his back to the door, moving over to the bed. He crawled forwards upon it, collapsing on his front with a heavy sigh.
He closed his eyes and was fast asleep in minutes.

Sometime later, Magnet knocked on his door.
There was no answer, so he stepped in, finding Cam fast asleep still.
Magnet hesitated for a moment. He moved across the room and leant over Cam, shaking him lightly.
Cam jumped to a start, grabbing Magnet’s arm roughly. Both seemed surprised at the other, staring with wide eyes frozen.
‘I'm sorry’ Cam mumbled, letting go of Magnet’s arm hastily and sitting up. ‘You…. startled me that’s all.’
‘Were you expecting an intruder?’ Magnet asked him, massaging his arm where Cam had grabbed him. ‘You’ve got a tight grip by the way’ he added.
‘Why did you wake me?’ Cam asked rising to his feet.
‘Because’ Magnet said to him, ‘the others are here.’
Cam felt a twinge of nervousness in his stomach.
‘They're excited to meet you’ Magnet went on. ‘Are you ready?’
‘Yeah’ Cam mumbled turning to him with his head bowed. ‘I'm coming.’
Outside his room, waiting in the area just outside the lift doors, were five other figures. The first one Cam noticed, and the one to first one to introduce himself.
‘Hey!’ the cheery man said rising from his seat and sailing towards him. ‘This must be the one everyone’s talking about!’
The man had bright pink hair that was short and spiky at the top and tied into a long ponytail at the bottom. He was lean and muscular, his tank top showing off his strength, and he wore gloves on his hands that left his fingers free, with metal running along the knuckles.

‘The name’s Pink’ the man said extending a hand with a wide grin. ‘It’s a pleasure to meet you.’
‘You too’ Cam replied, shaking his hand uncertainly.
‘Let me introduce the team’ Pink said turning to the others. ‘The girls here are Elaina’ he indicated the woman who sat upon the sofa, modestly dressed and petite with black hair cut in a bob, ‘and Selye’ he gestured to a mature woman who dressed more like a man, with muscular arms despite her slender build. She had very thick hair that was blonde and curly, highlighted and reaching the bottom of her back, it was tied in a ponytail and stiff with gel. She placed her hands upon her hips and regarded him with a look of scrutiny.
‘This here is Sydney’ Pink said indicating a young man standing nearby. He was slender and handsome. Sydney raised an eyebrow at Cam, regarding him with a look of curiosity and interest. ‘And last but not least’ Pink said, turning to the tallest figure in the room, ‘this is Russell.’
Russell has black skin and was nearly a head taller than everyone in the room, with huge muscles and a permanent glare.
‘Pleasure’ Cam nodded to him.
Russell nodded mutely back, standing with his arms crossed.
‘Now that the introductions are over’ Selye spoke uncrossing her arms, ‘I want to know more about you.’
‘I won’t speak of my past’ Cam said quickly.
‘But why?’ Selye said. ‘I'm dying to know.’ She frowned at him. ‘They say you were tortured.’
‘They can say whatever they like’ Cam spoke with confidence, turning to face her. ‘I don’t care what other people think.’
‘That’s probably best’ Elaina spoke quietly in return. ‘Don’t live for other people. Live for yourself.’
‘I like him’ Sydney gleamed. ‘He’s interesting.’
Cam turned to him as he spoke, staring at him silently.
‘I would love to know more about you though’ Sydney continued, ‘but I will find out for myself in time. You are one of our team now.’
‘Speaking of which’ Magnet interrupted, ‘Sig is waiting to see you in the training grounds. You must show us your powers and begin training. I for one…am very excited to see this.’

A short while later that very same day, Cam stood before Sig in the training grounds. The rest of the team which he was now officially a part of, was waiting behind him, watching silently a few steps back
‘Right’ Sig said gruffly to Cam. ‘You claim to be able to use magic, let’s see what you can do then.’
Cam swallowed the lump in his throat, staring back at Sig anxiously. Sig was an older man of about fifty; he was bearded and was a little rough around the edges, and not just his appearance but his attitude as well. He always seemed tense, always glaring and gritting his teeth. He was a battle-scarred man and wore an eye patch over his right eye. He had seen much horror in his time, but never spoke about it, not to a single soul.
‘What do you want me to do?’ Cam asked Sig quietly.

They stood now in what looked like a large hanger, brightly lit from above, the silver walls and ceiling hiding them away from the rest of the world. This little area within the facility was in itself like a little haven. It was where many of the soldiers came to train, and they loved it here.
Sig turned around, jerking his head towards the targets around them. They stood in the centre of the training facility now, and their voices echoed as they spoke.
'We use these for target practice' Sig explained, indicating shapes around them that were held in place by little tracks. These shapes were simple grey and did not represent anything, man or beast. 'They're just made of cardboard' Sig explained looking around him at the targets. 'I want you to destroy them…. without using a gun.'
Cam dipped his head slightly, before looking away from Sig and towards the targets, there were many around them.
'I want you to destroy that one first' Sig pointed to one of them. 'Could you do that?'
'I think so' Cam mumbled uncertainly.
'Then we can see how strong you are and what you're worth.'
'This should be good' Magnet spoke clearly from nearby. 'Go ahead. Do your thing.'
'We'll watch from the side-lines' Sig said beginning to move away, 'it could be dangerous…and if you claim to be unfamiliar with using your own magic…well…' his next few words were inaudible muttering.
The group moved away from Cam, standing as far away as they could at the edges of the great room.
'Go on then!' Sig called out to him. 'Do your thing! Show us how useful you are to us!'
Beside him Magnet took out some binoculars from his coat casually, like he carried them everywhere. He raised them and looked at Cam through them.
Cam stared back nervously. He scratched his palms then as he began to sweat a little. He took a slow and steady breath.
The others gasped suddenly in shock and awe as Cam's hair slowly faded to white and his clothes brightened until they were glowing pale like his skin. Magnet took the binoculars away from his eyes, staring in wide eyed amazement at Cam.
Cam faced his target, staring intently at the one he intended to destroy. He stepped to the side, directing his magic, before shooting it outwards.
He let out a groan with the effort of concentrating his attack as the magic erupted from his body.
Several of the targets smashed before him, broken by sheer force, the one he had aimed for, and several either side.
'Whoa' Elaina gasped as she watched with the others, 'that was incredible!'
'Impressive' Selye mumbled.
'But he's got no control' Sig grumbled.
He frowned then.
'Now try to break all the other targets!' Sig hollered at Cam. 'Go on!'
'Are…are you sure?!' Cam called back turning to him.
'Just do it man!' Magnet called back. 'Go ahead.'
Beside him Elaina waved encouragingly at him, grinning widely.
Cam faced the other way again, feeling a very strong sense of wrongness in him then.

He took a deep breath.
The noise was loud as the magic erupted outwards in all directions, every target around Cam shattered into tiny pieces. The very walls of the hall were damaged, and the group that had watched has all been thrown backwards to the floor, though none of them were hurt as Cam had directed the magic away from them.
'What the hell was that?!' Russell cried out as he picked himself up and back to his feet.
'That was so cool!' Pink cried out excitedly, balling his fists and quivering as he lay on the floor staring up at the ceiling.
Sydney rose to his feet, turning to help Pink up too.
Cam approached them slowly.
'I'm sorry' he said.
'Please don't hurt us!' Magnet begged.
'Hu?'
'I'm just kidding' Magnet grinned straightening up. 'That was incredible!'
Cam didn't think so. He turned around then, staring behind him at what he had destroyed.
He felt suddenly very afraid of himself.
'What's wrong?' Selye asked him.
'I just…' Cam mumbled, 'I didn't mean to…'
'It ok' Sig replied briskly, a little irritated at being knocked over. He dusted himself off. 'I must admit I am impressed but…' he straightened then, glaring at Cam as was his usual expression. 'You need to learn more control. You have so much power and you just flail it around.'
Cam's cheeks went red then, and he bowed his head, feeling ashamed.
'I want you to start training with your team…. on second thought I want you to train on your own' Sig added quickly. 'You are not under any circumstances allowed to use your magic around them. If you hurt anyone because of careless action there will be consequences, do I make myself clear?'
'Um…yes…'
'I want you to be supervised by your team when you train' Sig said, 'and I want you to watch the rest of your team as *they* train, it will help you better understand what we do. But under *no* circumstances do I want you to train *together'* Sig added angrily. 'Not yet anyway.'
'I understand' Cam mumbled.
'Good. And everyone' he spoke loudly to the others, as they immediately snapped to attention (all except for Magnet), 'let today be a lesson. Cam here has clearly shown that he had a huge amount of magic, but remember he is dangerous' Sig continued turning to face Cam. 'Never forget that and I want you *all* to be careful. Understand?!'
'Yes sir!' they replied.
'And you too Magnet?' Sig said.
'Yes sir' Magnet replied dully.
Cam began to feel very dizzy.
'There's a lot I want from you to succeed at' Sig continued speaking to Cam, though Cam barely heard him, his head dipping lower as a sudden and intense weakness washed over him.
I've used too much magic…
Sig continued talking for a few more seconds before falling silent.

‘Are you listening?’
Cam fell to his knees suddenly, Selye rushed to catch him before he collapsed to the ground, the others around him stepping forward, tense and alarmed.
‘Cam are you alright?!’
Cam’s shoulders hunched, and he raised a hand slowly to his head.
‘Do you feel dizzy?’ Selye asked him as she continued to hold him, helping support his body.
‘Yeah…’ Cam whispered, his voice barely audible as his vision clouded over.
‘I think he’s used too much magic’ Selye said to the others.
Cam was given a few minutes to gather himself before he was able to rise to his feet again. Still feeling incredibly weak, Selye escorted him back to their dormitories, helping to carry him. They left the training hall and Selye helped him into a small vehicle, specially designed to travel the streets of the facility, a thing that looked more like a golf buggy than anything else and could only travel just above walking speed.
‘How are you doing?’ Selye asked Cam as she climbed into the driver’s seat.
‘I feel sick’ Cam mumbled back.
‘Put your head between your knees’ Selye said starting the engine. ‘We’ll be back to the dorms soon.’
When they reached their dormitory, Selye helped Cam to his room, where he slept for hours.
Back at the head of the facility, Sig spoke with the others.
‘He is very valuable’ Sig was saying. ‘Protect him at all costs…we will help to train him…though our knowledge is limited…’ he frowned. ‘I have never known in all my years…a man to hold magic *within his very body*, to not need the use of magical objects……...incredible…’
‘Will we go on missions together?’ Elaina asked.
‘Yes’ Sig replied, ‘…in time. But I want him to be absolutely at his peak before he goes out there on any missions. I want his magic *under control*, and I want him to be strong but in control…. I don’t want anyone to get hurt because of him. I want you all to watch over him. Can you do that?’
‘Yes’ the rest of the team nodded.
‘I want Cam to begin training as soon as he is ready’ Sig told them. ‘The rest of you, I want you to continue training now.’

That evening, Cam lay on his bed alone in his room, feeling utterly exhausted, and more tired than he had been before he slept. Travelling to a new world was very draining on him, adjusting to such a different place, growing accustomed to their strange ways, meeting so many new people…and using magic as he had….
‘I've never felt so drained in all my life…’ he whispered to himself.
‘You have’ said the masked figure, ‘when you first released all your magic, in the world where you were kept a prisoner.’
Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.
Cam lifted his head, his heart jolted at the sound.
‘Who is it?’
The door opened, and Sydney entered, closing the door behind him.

‘I wanted to see you’ he said to Cam. ‘Do you mind if I come in?’
Cam considered him for a moment, before answering. ‘No.’
Sydney smiled then, moving forwards and sitting beside Cam on the bed.
He turned to Cam.
‘I didn’t want to bother you’ Sydney said to him. ‘I just wanted to see how you are.’
‘I'm fine’ Cam said to his knees, keeping his head low.
Sydney reached a hand towards him, touching his chin and turning his head towards his.
Cam stared at him in silence for several seconds, feeling a little confused as Sydney stared back at him, doing nothing.
Cam let out a breath, relaxing then, before leaning forwards to kiss him.
Cam pushed Sydney back upon the bed, rolling on top of him and slipping his hand into Sydney’s trousers, caressing him gently between the legs.
Sydney let out a moan, resting back against the bed. His hands reached up, gripping the muscles of Cam’s arms tightly.
Cam got off him then, pulling his hand back and kneeling before him.
Cam grasped the top of Sydney’s trousers, unzipping them and pulling them down.
He threw them away, reaching for Sydney again and gasping onto his leg, running his tongue along his thigh and kissing him, the sound of his lips upon Sydney’s flesh was soft.
He moved slowly, Sydney lying back on the bed let out a moan, body tense, grasping the bed sheets and breathing slowly.
Cam raised himself then, leaning over Sydney, kissing him tenderly, slipping his tongue inside his mouth, his hand going between his legs.
Sydney let out another moan as Cam lifted his legs up, unzipping his own trousers then and pleasuring himself. He slipped his fingers into Sydney, making sure he was ready, before pushing forward.

They fell asleep after that, side by side and huddled together in the single bed. They stayed this way until the next morning, sleeping peacefully.
Cam woke, rising from the bed and getting dressed as behind him still in bed, Sydney began to stir.
They left his room, meeting the other members of the team who were gathered for breakfast.
Selye was the first to notice them approaching.
‘Oh’ she said, realising they had both left from the same room, her face breaking into a natural smile then, and one of amusement. ‘Good morning you two.’
Cam sat mutely at the table as Sydney grinned back at Selye.
‘Morning’ Sydney beamed. ‘What's happening today then?’
‘Cam needs to continue training’ Selye spoke firmly. ‘That is the most important thing right now. He has a long way to go…and a lot to work on.’
‘I don’t have enough control over my powers’ Cam grumbled then, frowning as he stared down at the table. ‘I’m… I’m not good enough.’
‘I’m sure it will all come to you in time’ Sydney replied calmly, speaking with sincerity and glancing to the side towards Cam, who said nothing. ‘I'm sure you can hold your own.’

‘For some of the smaller monsters maybe’ Selye answered, as Russell silently took the seat beside her with a bowl of cereal before him. ‘I’d like to see how you fare against the larger beasts’ she said to Cam
‘I’ll be fine’ Cam said to his toast, staring at the jam closely. ‘I’ll kill anything that gets in my way’ he told her.
‘There’s more to fighting than just killing’ Selye replied, ‘you need wisdom as well as strength to fight your enemy, and never underestimate your opponent…that sort of behaviour could get you killed…and it just takes one mistake.’
Beside her Elaina and Pink nodded mutely in agreement at this, humming as they continued to eat.
‘I will keep that in mind’ Cam replied, as behind Magnet appeared from his room, joining the others at the table.
‘Hey guys’ Magnet grinned at them. ‘How y’all doing?’
‘You took your time getting up’ Pink frowned at him, cocking his head at Magnet.
‘So, when do we go to the training grounds?’ Elaina asked the room.
‘As soon as we finish breakfast’ Selye answered. ‘As soon as possible.’

Cam ate his breakfast quickly, trying to ignore the growing feeling of anxiety within at whatever was the come. The training. *I hope I will be good enough* Cam worried silently to himself. As he sat there Sydney glanced at him from the side, unable to stop himself. Cam looked towards him, meeting his gaze.
The two stared for a moment, before looking away silently. None of the others noticed, except for Selye, who said nothing.
Cam rose from the table then, suddenly feeling restless. As he waited for the others to finish their breakfasts, he began to slowly wander around the room, gazing about him at the pictures on the walls. They were generic pictures, and scenes of peaceful things, mostly of nature, a flower, a river…some trees…a lamb with a butterfly on its nose.
‘You should have a bookshelf in here’ Cam voiced then suddenly.
‘Oh yeah’ Magnet said looking up and grinning. ‘I forget you like to read. You read so fast. Never known anyone who could faster. Quite impressive.’
Cam simply hummed in response, glancing back towards the others, before turning away again.
And then Cam noticed something of interest, resting upon a stand. It looked like a weapon of some kind, a long staff, with a cruel blade at one end. Strange, he had never noticed this before.
Cam reached for it, taking it in his hands and lifting it. He observed it closely. It seemed to be strangely out of place here, like it didn’t truly belong.
Suddenly the weapon began to glow a bright white, the metal burning hot in his hands.
Cam gasped; eyes wide in shock as he stepped back, letting go of the weapon. The weapon before him hung in the air, changing in shape and growing in size until it transformed into a human figure, a female figure.
Cam blinked in confusion, staring at the woman with disbelief as he took a step back.
She was completely naked, her skin black like ebony and carved with what looked like runes that glowed a vivid blue. She had black ears like a fox’s that sat on the top of her head, a

young and pretty face, and long thick hair red like the setting sun. Cam couldn't help thinking suddenly of Lucy then.
'Hello' the female figure spoke politely. 'I've not seen you before. Are you new?'
Cam could only stare in shock, unable to speak. The others sitting around the table had stopped what they were doing, watching now in silence.
'Are you alright?' the strange female said to Cam.
'W…what are you?'
'You've met at last every member of this team' Magnet smiled from where he sat.
'Team member?' Cam breathed, as before him the strange female figure continued to smile sweetly.
'She is different from the rest of us' Magnet told Cam, rising from his seat and sauntering over. He came to lean on her shoulder, the strange female gleamed back at Magnet happily, tilting her head shyly. 'Her name is Philosopher' Magnet explained, 'but we just call her Filly for short. She is what we call a familiar, a weapon with magical powers that can take on human-like forms; they help us fight the monsters' Magnet explained. 'They are rare, only very few are issued with them. This one belonged to Earnest…he…was the member of our team we lost…. you live in his room now. You are his replacement.' Magnet sighed unhappily, and as Cam watched him closely, he saw true grief in his expression. 'Everything of his has been taken away' Magnet went on, 'there is nothing left of his…save for his familiar. She is yet to find a new home.'
'Why can't she stay here?' Cam asked.
'Familiar's bond only to certain people' Magnet told him. 'They work best with the masters they match closely with, in personality type and strength and character' he paused then. 'She doesn't properly match anyone here I'm afraid. That is why a new home is being found for her. I'm afraid she won't be here much longer.'
'It's true' Filly said bowing respectfully. 'I miss my master Earnest, though I am both excited and nervous at finding a new master.'
'It won't be long now' Magnet told her sincerely. 'Now, return.'
She transformed back into the staff again, which Magnet replaced back on the stand.
'Pretty cool hu?' Magnet said, turning back and grinning to Cam excitedly.
'Um…yeah….it was…'
'Caught you off guard eh?'
'Yeah a little' Cam smiled awkwardly. He faltered then, the smile falling from his expression. 'What happened to him?'
'You mean Earnest?' Magnet said, lifting his head as he considered Cam. 'He…. was killed by a monster. It was a few weeks ago…some time has passed but…. it's still very fresh in our minds.'
Cam glanced past Magnet then, towards the others, and he saw their expressions. They were still grieving.
Cam suddenly felt guilty.
'I…' he began, 'know what it's like to lose someone close to you.'
Magnet nodded at that, his expression tense for a moment, before breaking into a smile.
'Right' he said to Cam cheerily. 'Are you ready to begin training?'

Cam left the building with Magnet and the other team members, heading across the facility, towards the training grounds. The next thing he knew, Cam was standing in a large building complex, made of several smaller dwellings built close together and connected with halls and corridors. As he made his way through the maze of rooms and corridors, Cam quickly lost himself, wondering briefly if he were alone would he ever find his way out again. But Sig and Magnet were with him, as where the other team members, leading him through the place.
'This is where we keep our beasts' Sig was grumbling at him. 'We have many different sorts.'
They came to a sort of balcony then, overlooking a large pit below them, within which were several small beasts that looked like moving shadows.
'What are they?' Cam breathed, leaning forwards tentatively and staring down with caution.
'These are the weakest monsters that exist in this world' Sig explained, as Magnet beside him leant forward upon the rails, smiling down upon the creatures, next to him stood the others, Russell and Sydney, Pink, Seyle and Elaina. 'The monsters in this world are different from what we call *normal* animals like cats and dogs and horses and such' Sig went on. 'Normal animals live what we call natural lives…like we do. They eat, they hunt; they breed and survive on their own. The creatures that live in this world that we call monsters are different from natural animals. They are violent creatures, who seem to have a strong desire to attack and fight those that are not of their own species, be it human or not. They seem not to reproduce naturally, nor eat simply to satisfy their hunger…they seem to lack the same emotions that exist in other animals, emotions that are important for them to survive. The creatures that we classify as monsters, seem to have no sense of fear or caution. What we classify as monsters, are creatures that seem to only have a will to attack, and not live a natural life.'
'I see' Cam mumbled, staring at the pit below him.
'If we were to release a larger monster into this pit' Sig continued, 'all those creatures, despite being the weakest of their kind, would all turn to attack the larger beast. Not for survival, not for food…just because….'
'I see' Cam said again.
'We have spent a long time in this world studying monsters' Sig said turning to him. 'There are many different kinds of monsters. We categorize them in order of their strength, from category A being the strongest, to category Z being the weakest. These here' Sig indicated the scuttling shadows below them, 'we rank as the weakest. These are category Z monsters.'
Cam looked down at the monsters. The little creatures in the pit below them, if anything, seemed peaceful. They chattered amongst themselves, wandering about in the empty pit which they were trapped in, nudging each other as they went and flicking their long tails.
'The weaker monsters are more common' Sig continued. 'The strongest monsters are…thankfully…far less common. The strongest monster we have here in this facility is a category T.'
Sig moved away from the balcony, heading towards the door, the others followed. They came to a sort of corridor, with a large sheet of glass on one side that looked into another room, within which was another monster. It was large in size, with great backwards curved black horns and shaggy red fur that covered its entire body. Its claws were cruel; its teeth were long, and its eyes gleaming.

‘It’s exactly the same as the hologram we saw before’ Cam realised, speaking aloud.
‘It sure is’ Magnet smirked beside him.
‘This’ Sig indicated, ‘is a category T.’
‘Do they not go by any other name?’ Cam asked.
‘No’ Sig replied. ‘They are categories…and letters…nothing more.’
The large creature slunk back and forth, its movements agitated, like a beast that had been caged for a long time and longed for the outside world.
‘Can it see us?’ Cam asked Sig.
‘Yes’ Sig mumbled. He raised his hand and waved at the monster.
The category T roared furiously, swiping its massive claws and throwing its body against the glass.
Cam swallowed nervously, stepping back.
‘Don’t worry’ Magnet said, seeing Cam’s reaction. ‘That glass is more than strong enough to hold it. And if it wasn’t….’ he smiled, ‘our team could handle it.’
‘You could do that?’ Cam spoke in awe, turning to face Magnet.
‘Well we’d need our weapons’ Magnet replied.
‘This…’ Cam uttered, ‘is a category T?’ he turned to the others. ‘What on earth is a category A?’
‘They are truly evil’ Sig glowered turning to him. ‘Trust me. You *do not* want to meet one. *Ever!* They are rare thank god, but they are evil, truly evil monsters who actively *enjoy* torturing and playing with whatever they're about to kill. They are intelligent, which makes them more dangerous, but they are powerful also. Unlike these monsters’ Sig indicated the Category T, ‘who seem to rely on mainly instinct…or so it seems, category A’s are as intelligent as humans.’
‘And is this monster intelligent at all?’ Cam asked looking at the beast.
‘Not really’ Sig replied nonchalantly, shrugging. ‘Not that much.’
‘How much damage can it do?’
Sig turned to him.
‘It would take at least five soldiers to bring it down’ he said, ‘five fully armed and strong soldiers. Its hide is thick, and it is a monster with tons of muscle, sharp teeth and claws……it could kill a human in a single blow. You see those horns?’
Cam’s attention drifted then to the great curved horns that grew from its skull.
‘Those horns are made from one of the strongest known materials in this world. We sometimes use it for ourselves for various things. But it’s very difficult to obtain, and its rare so it’s pretty expensive.’
‘Amazing’ Cam breathed in awe, unable to stop himself.
‘Come on’ Sig said turning from the beast, ‘let’s see what's next.’
They moved onto the next room.
‘Your training will begin with a category Y’ Sig informed.
‘Not a Z?’ Cam asked tentatively.
‘No. They are very weak. Too weak. You could kick them and they would die. Though they have strength in number…we don’t have enough here at the facility that would pose a threat or even a challenge.’
‘Oh.’

‘No’ Sig said again. ‘You will be staring with a category Y.’
They entered the next room, and Cam felt his stomach tighten nervously then.
They stood now on another balcony, overlooking what looked like an arena, massive in size. In the centre, was a huge beast, with large feet, a shaggy body of fur that looked like heavy moss, and a flat face that was barely visible through the fur. There were two huge tusks that curved outwards from its mouth, and its beady eyes were only just visible. They were bright yellow.
The arena was large, but the beast took up nearly the entire room.
‘You want me to fight *that*?’ Cam fumbled, feeling panic suddenly clawing at his heart.
‘We want you to kill that’ Sig gleamed turning to him. ‘Don’t worry. It’s easier than it looks. It is a slow and stupid beast. You’ll do it without much effort I'm sure.’ He smiled again. ‘Just release your power’ he said. ‘In time we want you to be more precise with your magic, but for now just show us what you can do.’
‘You’ll be fine’ Magnet encouraged. ‘If I can kill one of these things on my own then I know you can.’
‘You could kill it?’ Cam asked.
‘I have done before’ Magnet nodded. ‘More than once. They have several weak spots hidden beneath all that fur.’ He smiled reassuringly at him then. ‘You’ll be fine’ he said to him. ‘I know you will.’

Before he knew it, Cam was standing in the pit with the monster, feeling lost and completely out of his depth and more than a little nervous as the thing lumbered around to face him.
‘Don’t be intimidated by its size!’ Magnet called out to him from the balcony above. ‘It’s incredibly stupid and not that bright either! You can do it!’
‘Yeah thanks’ Cam muttered through gritted teeth, not sure if Magnet was teasing him.
Above him the others watched, huddled together on the small balcony. Sydney leant over the wall, balling his fists nervously as he watched. He tensed suddenly as he saw the monster moving forwards, heading towards Cam and picking up speed.
In no time at all it was nearly upon him, Cam who had frozen in shock at first, mind suddenly gone blank, gathered himself at the last second and rolled to the side, out of the path of the hurtling beast.
It skidded to a stop, groaning and tossing its head about as it searched for him, no doubt wondering where he had gone.
Cam backed away from the thing thinking furiously.
Fight he thought. *Fight…kill…*
He cast his magic out, cutting the monster’s heels as it turned around to face him. It didn’t attack again, only shook its head in pain, becoming agitated. It turned its head away as Cam began to glow white again, shielding its tiny eyes from the glare.
Cam threw another spell out at it, striking it at the side of the head. The colossus slumped forwards, the weight of its body causing a tremor as it did. Cam gasped suddenly, seeing a glowing light coming from its flank, a mark of some kind was struggling to shine through the fur. He summoned all the magic he could to him, lashing out and aiming for the light.
The creature groaned loudly, leaning to the side before toppling over. Cam dropped to a knee to steady himself as the ground shook, watching in surprise as the monster’s gigantic form

suddenly broke up and faded away, drifting in the air like rising ash, before disappearing completely in seconds.
There was cheering from above from the team, *his* team, and Sig who watched silently, watched with a smile upon his face, and eyes warm and gentle.
He had done well.
'Good job Cam!' Magnet cried out as the others behind him began to clap. 'You found its weak spot pretty quick! Good job!'
Cam wretched suddenly and was violently sick, the effort of using magic was a great drain on his body, even in small amounts.
Above, the others watched a little awkwardly now, Magnet still standing there with his hand raised.
'Let's bring in the next beast, shall we?' Sig mentioned, completely unfazed.
'Hold on a second' Selye spoke up, 'we should let him rest.'
'We only get stronger by pushing our boundaries' Sig replied shortly. 'I want to see him fight again. I want to push him to his limit.'
Cam heard the sound of a door opening, whipping around to a spot behind him where a section of the wall was rising up. From this doorway came not one, but five monsters. They entered the pit with him.
Cam glanced back up at the balcony with alarm.
I can't! Cam thought desperately as he stared with pleading eyes. *I'm too weak.*
'Fight them!' Sig called down to him. 'Fight them and kill them, that's the only way!'
His breath caught in his throat then, heart missing a beat. He turned around then to face the creatures. Category X.
They resembled hyenas, but were the size of horses, with exaggerated manes and no eyes. Instead they seemed to sense what was around them by emitted a series of clicks from their uneven mouths. As they advanced, they turned their heads from side to side constantly.
They surrounded him, drawing closer only when they had closed the net.
Cam cast his magic out in all directions, his spells flailing around in panic, and instantly killing all five of the creatures in one sweep.
Above him Sig smiled.
'I think we have a prodigy here' he said, as before him Cam collapsed on all fours, head hung and body trembling violently. 'I want him to rest for the rest of this day, let him watch you train' he spoke to the team. 'I want him to learn from you all' he said. 'Tomorrow, I will push him even further, and the day after that, even further again. I want to see how far he can go.'

Interlude start

The next morning the guild ate around a large table, the food brought to them by the villagers, even Graham was being well cared for. They offered the white stag all sorts of food, but in the end, it was hay that he favoured.

‘What about the creature with the blue skin?’ a young woman asked Waltz as she placed a bowl of fruit before him.
‘He doesn’t like crowds’ Waltz explained, ‘in fact, he doesn’t like anyone, not even me…I don’t think so anyway…’
‘What?’ the woman laughed.
‘He is very suspicious and mistrustful of people’ Waltz explained. ‘At least he doesn’t hate me anymore’ he added in a grumble. ‘The only one he really likes and trusts is Sumaey.’
Sumaey glanced up at the sound of her name.
‘Why does he feel that way for you?’ the woman asked.
‘I am the one who gave him his name’ Sumaey told the woman. ‘I was there to protect him in his time of need, and he has formed a very strong attachment to me which has remained since that day.’
‘Oh, I see’ the woman smiled. She cleared Waltz’s plate away, replacing it with another filled with food.
‘Yummy’ Waltz declared, before digging in.
‘So, what does Loxus eat?’ another villager asked them, glancing towards the strange mechanical device. It looked like a spider-scorpion creature, with a tail arched over its back, at the end of which hung a lantern.
‘Well we haven’t actually fed him yet’ Sumaey replied to the old man. ‘We don’t know if he eats anything.’
‘He must eat *something*’ the old man said peering at Loxus.
Sumaey and Waltz exchanged a glance, but neither of them spoke.
‘I should get back to work soon’ the man said, ‘if there is anything you want then please don’t hesitate to let us know.’
‘Will do!’ Waltz waved happily.
The man heisted.
‘Is everything alright?’ Sumaey asked him, looking up.
The man smiled awkwardly. ‘Yes, it’s just…’ he frowned then. ‘The wraith is on everyone’s mind, we are just eager to see it gone.’
‘Oh, don’t you worry’ Waltz spoke confidently, leaning forwards on his elbows and giving the man a knowing expression. ‘We will put that creature from your thoughts.’
The man’s brow furrowed slightly. ‘It is evil’ he said. ‘I am not the only one who wants to see her gone.’
‘She’s not evil’ Waltz spoke up, causing the old man to fall silent.
Beside Waltz, Sumaey watched the man silently, clearly sharing the same opinion.
‘I think the wraith is just angry, misunderstood’ Waltz said. ‘I am eager to see this through.’
The man blinked uncertainly, clearly not understanding. He bowed his head then, smiling at the two, moving off after that.
‘Did you enjoy your breakfast?’ a young woman said to them a short while later.
They left the table with the woman after that, Waltz, Sumaey, Loxus and Graham. The woman whose name was Cassie, claimed to be a holy figure.
‘We don’t have any shrines around here’ Cassie was saying, ‘we’re just a small village, and we don’t have a lot of money to build a temple or anything like that.’

‘So where do you worship?’ Waltz asked her, as they made their way across the wheat field and towards the edge of the forest where a small stream trickled along its winding path peacefully.
‘Here’ Cassie said to them, pulling back a curtain of ivy to reveal a wall fountain, in the middle there was a large face, its mouth open, and water running down its tongue and into the bowl below. ‘It’s only small’ Cassie smiled shyly. ‘The villagers come here sometimes to pray.’ Cassie bowed her head. ‘Sometimes prayers get answered.’
‘Do you pray?’ Waltz asked, stepping beside her and gazing at the modest fountain.
‘Yes’ Cassie said, blushing slightly. ‘I do.’
Behind them Loxus remained impassive, expressionless with his metal face as Graham beside moved forward to sniff the fountain. He moved as if about to drink from it, before Sumaey grabbed him by the horn, pulling him back and glaring at him.
‘And what do you pray for?’ Waltz asked Cassie, ignoring the others and doing his best to pretend they were invisible.
‘Oh’ Cassie waved him away with a smile. ‘All sorts really…’
Waltz was about to politely be nosy when Sumaey suddenly gasped.
It wasn’t a gasp of slight surprise, but one of genuine shock, but Waltz did not look around at once, he was still facing ahead.
‘What is it?’ he asked Sumaey casually without turning.
‘Look you idiot!’
Waltz blinked carelessly at her, before turning a second later.
‘…oh…’
Before them at the edge of the wheat field, was the wraith, a terrifying spectacle. A grim figure that hovered in the air, with a body that emanated a grey-green glow, the face was scarred, and the hair and the tattered dress lifted and swayed as if underwater.
Cassie shrieked in terror, recoiling behind Waltz who drew his sword, the blade singing, the single sound resonating through the air.
The wraith leant forwards in the air, screaming at them. Her call travelled far, and Waltz and the others could already hear cries from the village as people at the edge of the field on the other side spotted the wraith. They ran to their homes, and moments later, a bell began to ring. An alarm, a signal.
‘I know what you are’ Waltz spoke bravely, pointing his sword at the wraith, ‘and I want to show everyone the truth, to make them see clearly at last.’
Beside him Sumaey had summoned magic to her, her hands consumed in blue flame. Loxus was agitated, and Graham whipped his long tails, pawing at the ground and bowing his head.
Loxus leapt forwards suddenly without warning, Waltz cried for him to stop.
The wraith leant back, casting her arms out. Loxus’s movements slowed as he reared up, towering over the ghostly figure.
There were a series of clicks, and Loxus’s body slowly began to fall, collapsing to the ground and twitching and jerking around. His long tail flopped back and forth, the lantern on the end toppled to the side, the candle within had gone out.
The wraith drew back sharply, gliding backwards, the tattered trails of her dress dragging after her.
The wraith turned, shooting off with unnatural speed.

‘Hey wait!’ Sumaey called after Waltz as he leapt upon Graham’s back, kicking his sides hard like one would to a horse.
Graham leapt forwards, charging off, Sumaey tried to stop them, but they were both out of her reach. Her hair and dress lowered again, the gush of wind was strong as they shot past her.
Sumaey reached to them as they went, grasping at the air.
She gritted her teeth, stepping back. Sumaey shot a glance back at Cassie.
‘Watch over Loxus’ she breathed, before running forwards as fast as she could, her red skirt trailing after her as she went.
She made after Waltz and Graham, as they headed back towards the hill, back towards the dark lake where the wraith was said to stay.
Cassie reached a hand out to them, pausing with her arm still extended.
She smiled then, lowering her hand and casting a glance over towards Loxus, the strange mechanical spider-like creature, with its scorpion-like tail, the lantern now extinguished at the end, now resting upon the ground.
She approached the still mechanical body, kneeling next to it.
‘Do not worry’ she smiled knowingly, ‘everything will be fine. The wraith will find a place of peace, and everyone will be happy…’ She reached a hand out, touching Loxus’s cold body. ‘I know everything about you’ she breathed, sending her magic through her arm and into the creature’s body, healing him, making him strong again. ‘You will be alright’ she smiled, as the creature rose to its feet again. ‘The others will be safe’ Cassie told Loxus as the mechanical creature slowly turned to face her, its intelligence hidden behind its smooth and empty eyes. ‘Waltz will be hurt’ Cassie went on, ‘his life will be put in danger…but he will be saved by one who is following you.’ She smiled. ‘This I know…’

Interlude end

Many months later

Cam strode down the corridor, casting his hand out as the magic ran to his fingertips.
He raised his head, baring his teeth at the monster before him.
The category T roared at him, pawing the ground with its great claws and swinging its mighty curved horns back and forth and shaking its body in agitation, its bright red shaggy fur was all he could see now. It took up the entire space in the corridor before him. There was no way to escape now, not that he wanted to. Cam knew he could handle this, and he didn’t miss a beat, not even when he saw the monster before him crouch low about to pounce, allowing Cam to spot a second category T behind the first. Cam heard a noise, glancing around and seeing another three category T’s behind him, crowding the corridor as they crawled forwards, eager to get to him. They all wanted to kill him, Cam could see the bloodlust in their eyes.

Cam grimaced then in agitation, realising he was going to have to use more magic than he originally intended. He stood to the side, glancing either side down the corridors at the monsters as they advanced, snarling and roaring and bearing their teeth. But Cam was not intimidated.

Cam raised his hands out either side of him, summoning his magic to him.

A strong wind picked up in the corridor around him. Cam's hair and clothes lifted, turning white and beginning to glow.

The light grew blindingly strong, destroying everything either side of him.

When Cam opened his eyes next, the five monsters were gone, fading away in like ash floating on a breeze, disappearing altogether.

Cam let out a deep sigh, leaning back against the wall, his arms dropping to his side as his knees began to tremble with exhaustion. He was strong, and his training had made him stronger than he ever imagined he could be, his magic now under control. And though he was growing stronger still and could control his magic fully now, he was still sloppy, like a child flailing around a sharpened sword. He had come a long way, but still had a long way to go, this much he knew to be true.

He felt then a natural wind ruffle his clothes, and as Cam turned, he saw that further down the corridor, there was a great break in the wall, a way to the outside.

It was night time now, and as Cam marched down the corridor to stand upon the rubble, he could see the world beyond the building.

The street lights twinkled in the distance like little stars, pretty, serene. Further away on the roads, the cars and buses drove back and forth, though there were no people in the street. There was a great space between the building he was in and the rest of the town, between these things there was a stretch of beach, a peaceful natural spot caught between the human constructions.

Cam crawled through the rubble, out of the building and out into the cool night.

He was alone.

Cam glanced about him. Everything around him was still now, the monsters they had been called out for to eradicate, were gone. The other members of his team were elsewhere.

Cam made his way down the hill, moving slowly down the steep slope and down to the beach.

He slid down and grassy bank, righting himself as his feet came to touch the soft sand.

Straightening up, Cam made his way forwards toward the gentle ocean, watching as the little waves lapped up at the sand, moving back and forth constantly.

It was so peaceful here, so tranquil. Cam had become accustomed to this world and had spent a longer time here than he had in any world he had visited previously, save for his own of course. He liked it here, he had his team, people who cared for him, and he had his job, a thing that gave him purpose, although he didn't always fully understand it. He spent a lot of his time simply following orders and not understanding why…. but still…he was fighting for a good cause. His team…. they were close, they could even have been called his family. They had put themselves in danger for him numerous times in the past during missions, as he had for them. They worked as a unit, as one, and Cam had begun to believe they were unstoppable.

A voice called out to him then and Cam turned, seeing Selye jogging up to him from across the beach.
'There you are' she huffed. 'I thought for a minute we'd lost you for good then. Did you have to wander off your own like that?'
'Oh' Cam mumbled. 'Sorry.'
Selye watched him closely then, tilting her head. 'There were five category T's in your area' she told him, 'before I left the building.' She paused. 'Did you see them?'
'Yes' Cam replied. 'They are gone.'
Selye grinned widely at him, reaching out to grasp his shoulder then.
'*Well done'* she spoke sincerely.
Cam bowed his head, hand going to his wrist suddenly, where there was a tracker disguised as a watch. He wore one now like the rest of his team, a device for their own safety so they could find each other during missions, though they were expected to wear it at all times, just in case.
The fighting members of the organisation were incredibly valuable. A lot of money was spent on their training, so they were protected. The trackers they wore would show their location, so each could be found if they were in danger. It also monitored their heartbeats and the signal would read if a team member had died.
'Look' Selye hissed suddenly, her attention drawn suddenly towards the sea. 'There's more…they're probably the life forms we sensed on the radar earlier.
Cam turned away from the town and towards the ocean, seeing the monsters crawling out of the sea.
'Category W' Selye said, pulling forth the sword from her waist. 'Here we go.'
Cam watched with disinterest as the monsters dragged themselves from the waters.
They were strange creature, bizarre water beasts, with large tails like that of eels, and from the waist up a human-like body. Their skin was leathery and their eyes large.
'Do you need my help?' Cam asked her lazily.
'Nah' Selye waved him away. 'I got this.'
She stepped forward, whipping her sword through the air.
The monsters crawled forwards, dragging themselves across the sand cumbersome. Suddenly several shot up into the air at once, darting back and forth like dragonflies would, moving at impossible speed. But they were still a large target.
Selye lunged to the side to avoid their swift attack, stabbing the air and swiping at them and cutting them down, stabbing them once they fell to the ground screaming, twisting the blade in their bodies and cutting their cries short.
She had killed all but one now, which darted towards Cam, who carelessly flicked his hand through the air, causing the monster to instantly catch fire and fall to the ground, rising again as ash and fading away. His magic was strong.
'Dammit' Selye cursed, staring at her forearm where one of the beasts had cut her. 'That's gonna need stitches.'
'Where do they keep coming from?' Cam asked her.
'Beats me' she said sheathing her sword. 'Our job…our mission…is to eradicate these monsters…along with other things, but…' she trailed off.

‘There are more of them now’ Cam finished, ‘there are always more…no matter how many times we…’ he trailed off.
Selye nodded to the sands, before turning to face him again. ‘No matter how many our organisation seems to kill, their numbers only seem to increase.’ She frowned then. ‘I'm not the first one to voice this but…I fear there is something we don’t know yet.’
‘Hmm’ Cam said turning away.
‘I fear that something big is about to happen’ Selye continued raising her head to the sky. ‘Something big…something soon…’
‘Whatever happens’ Cam went on, ‘I'm sure we can deal with it.’
‘Well’ Selye smirked, ‘I hope so.’
‘Caaaaammm!’
They both glanced around to see Sydney running towards them from across the beach.
He threw himself into Cam’s arms, hugging him tightly.
‘Thank god you're alright’ Sydney said into his chest.
‘What do you think could possibly happen to me?’ Cam asked flatly, pushing him gently away. ‘I'm probably stronger than any of us here.’
‘Strong’ Sydney said, ‘but not invincible.’
Sydney moved forward then, kissing Cam on the lips briefly before stepping back.
‘What are we waiting for?’ Sydney asked.
‘Elaina, Pink and Russell’ Selye answered. ‘They should be here by now.’
At that very moment there was a sudden explosion coming from the town. It caught them all off guard.
‘Oh god…’ Selye whispered. ‘What is it this time…?’
The three of them all ran across the beach towards the explosion, following the trail of black smoke lifting higher in the sky as they headed up the beach.
Cam jumped up and grabbed the railings that separated the beach from the street, pulling himself up and climbing through. Selye and Sydney followed him as he led the way, running across the road without looking and ignoring the cars that screeched to a stop to avoid him, sounding their horns angrily.
When they came to the source of the commotion, they saw a scene of carnage.
People were cowering in fear; others were screaming and running as fast as they could away from the fires that burned in many of the buildings. Cam tilted his head to the side, seeing Russell kneeling nearby beside one of the wrecked cars, crouched and holding his arm to him. Cam could see blood trailing from his shoulder.
‘Russell!’ Cam called out to him.
He raised his head, glaring up at them.
Cam ran to him, stopping before him. ‘Are you alright?’
‘Nothing but a scratch’ Russell growled back through gritted teeth as he rose to his feet. ‘Don’t worry about me. I’ll be alright.’
‘Where are Elaina and Pink?’ Selye asked him.
Russell didn’t answer, only turned to glare across the wide street. It was then that the others noticed Elaina and Pink, standing with their backs to them and facing a great monster that hung in the air above them. Elaina was equipped with a staff, Pink, as usual, fought with only

his fists, the fingerless gloves he wore with metal running across the knuckles were reinforced with magic that was powerful against the monsters.
The monster they fought now was a category V. It looked like giant luminous snake, glowing a bright green as it floated through the air, weaving back and forth as if moving through water. Its head was large and wedge shaped, with beady eyes that glowed bright yellow.
It lunged at Elaina and Pink on the ground, hovering above them and out of reach only when it wasn't attacking. Cam could see Elaina and Pink were struggling, not because the monster was particularly strong, but because they couldn't reach it most of the time.
'CAM!' Pink called suddenly spotting him. 'A little help here!'
'I think you know what to do' Selye spoke seriously to him. 'Go on' she encouraged when Cam heisted. '*Work your magic*.'
Sydney, Selye and Russell hung back as Cam ran forwards towards the monster, towards Elaina and Pink.
'Perfect' Pink gasped as he came closer. 'You're just what we need right now.'
Cam craned his head back to the monster, it was writhing through the air as if suddenly agitated. Cam seemed to have that effect on the monsters around him. It was as if they could sense the magic within his body.
Cam performed his magic. His chest felt as if it suddenly began to tighten, as his feet left the ground, and his was lifted gently into the air.
He came eye-to-eye with the monster, each hanging in the air before the other, facing each other off, ready to fight.
On the ground, Pink smirked. 'That's never going to stop being awesome' he said watching Cam.
Cam stared back at the great beast, its expressionless eyes wide and unblinking. It twisted its body, jaw gaping as it moved to swallow him.
Cam's profile flickered, and he vanished into thin air, the serpent closing its mouth on nothing.
The others from the ground watched passively as Cam appeared suddenly close by the creature's body, just behind its head and out of its line of sight. He attacked, cutting the creature deep as blood rained down onto the streets below. The beast roared, falling in the sky before righting itself, its body sinking in the air before rising sharply upwards again. It lunged at Cam for the second time, but it was a cumbersome thing, and had little stamina. It was tired, but Cam knew its energy came back quickly to this creature. He needed to end this as soon as he could.
He landed on the creature's spine, freeing his magic to be able to attack easier. Using magic to lift himself in the air was a great strain, and he already felt his body had weakened from the effort. Already he felt better, standing on a surface again, though it was an unsteady one.
The serpent roared, a deep bellowing cry that echoed through the town, vibrating in Cam's very lungs.
He rounded then, running down the serpent's body as it continued to weave through the air. He headed for the great crest down its back. This creature Cam had never seen with his own eyes before, but he had learned about it, as he had with many of the monsters that existed in this world. It was a weaker creature, despite initial appearances. It had an obvious weak spot, and could be brought down easily, if you could reach it.

But as Cam ran down the body, getting closer to the crest, the crest lowered then, its skin crackling. Cam skidded to a stop before the crest, kneeling and summoning fire to his hands. The monster roared as Cam used his magic to break the crest at the base, ripping the flesh and tendons from its body. As the creature reared its head back in agony, Cam did not pause, tensing his body and balling his fists, his palm wreathed in flame as his eyes glowed, lit from the light that emanated from the monster's body. The weak spot.

Cam struck, and the monster instantly died. Slowing through the air and dropping fast. As the others watched on the ground, Cam became unseen as the monster's body turned into shadow, fading away like smoke in a wind.

Silence ensued, a silence that lasted mere seconds, before people began to clap and cheer. Many people had fled the scene at the first sign of the monsters, others had hidden, and the ones that had, now made themselves known.

The team, Russel, Sydney, Pink, Selye and Elaina, all watched Cam with joy and pride. He had become an indispensable member of their team, and easily the most powerful and most valuable member of their organisation. He had come a very long way from the man they had first known, but as they saw when he landed, he still was learning his powers, still familiarising himself with them, still learning his limits.

As soon as his feet touched the ground as he had descended, he doubled over and retched, being violently sick.

'You alright there buddy?' Pink asked him happily.

'Yeah' Cam mumbled, wiping his mouth and straightening up as he glanced back at Pink, the dizziness still washing over him. 'I'll be fine.'

'Well I say this is a job well done' Pink concluded, looking down at the device he carried in his hand. It was a sort of radar, sensing all hostile life in the area. 'All targets eliminated' he said smugly, putting it back on his person.

'I've just about had enough of all of this' Russel grumbled, rubbing at his arm tenderly. There was blood seeping from a wound, a deep cut from the fight, but nothing serious.

'I'll be looking forward to some coffee and a hot bath' Elaina sighed wearily, craning her head back and wiping her brow.

'I'll have something stronger like wine' Selye grinned, 'or maybe some whisky.'

Cam keeping to himself, just looked to the ground, scratching his head. He felt a slight skip in his heart then as he glanced up, seeing Sydney watching him closely.

'Come on!' Russel called out in his booming voice as the others were moving off. 'We haven't got all day' he told Sydney and Cam, and they turned walking after Russel. 'We've got to get back home, Magnet is probably bored out of his mind' Russel said, 'poor bastard' he added in a quiet voice, as the weary team headed back to their vehicle.

Cam trailed a little behind the others as they went, pausing one last time to glance back towards the ocean, where the monsters had appeared before himself and Selye.

Sydney glanced back at Cam then.

'Are you alright? What's wrong?'

'Nothing' Cam mumbled, turning away and continuing onwards. 'It doesn't matter.'

‘Oh, I can’t believe I missed the fun!’ Magnet complained as the rest of the team surrounded his bed.
‘Yeah I know’ Pink gleamed merrily, leaning forwards on the bottom of Magnets bed with his arms folded. ‘Seriously, you should have seen Cam out there, he’s like a boss, a total pro now!’
Magnet flopped back onto the pillows, turning his head the other way to stare at Cam.
‘I hear you’re doing very well’ he said to Cam.
‘Is that what they say? Cam replied calmly.
‘They say you took down a category V.’
‘Is that what they say?’ Cam repeated.
‘Oh, come on’ Selye said sternly to Magnet, ‘you know he doesn’t like that sort of attention. Isn’t that right?’ she said to Cam.
‘Sure’ he replied non-committedly.
‘So, when are they letting you go?’ Elaina asked politely.
‘Soon’ Magnet replied glumly, ‘that’s all they said.’
‘Fancy getting shot *yet again*’ Pink laughed at him as he continued to lean on the bottom of the bed. ‘You must have a guardian angel watching over you or something.’
‘Or maybe not’ Magnet replied with a stoic expression.
‘Well you’re not dead yet’ Pink winked. ‘That’s got to count for something right?’
‘Come on’ Russel spoke suddenly, ‘we should probably leave him to rest.’
‘No please don’t go!’ Magnet suddenly cried in panic. ‘It gets so boring around here, can’t you stay?’
‘Alright let’s stay’ Selye laughed.
‘We could play some board games together or something’ Magnet said pointing to the cupboard where they were stored, ‘and you can talk to me and tell me some stuff. The silence and boredom here is just *killing me*!’

They stayed with Magnet for hours, playing board games and drinking together. They had a lot of fun, and Cam smiled at the others as he listened to them speak. They were like a family, his team, he was a part of them now.
‘Hey airhead’ Pink nudged him then, indicating the board. ‘It’s your turn to move.’
‘Oh sorry’ Cam mumbled, snapping back to attention. ‘I was just daydreaming.’
‘Yeah no kidding.’
It was late by the time they left Magnet, who was sad to see them go.
‘Don’t look so despaired’ Selye laughed at him, as they slowly made their way out of the door. ‘We’ll be back. Heal fast so you can join us on missions again.’
‘Yeah’ Russel grumbled back at him. ‘It’s just not the same without you boss.’
Magnet had smiled at them.
‘Thanks’ he said. ‘And I will.’
They all went back together to their dormitory, each saying goodnight to each other and going to their separate rooms, all except for Sydney and Cam who both went to his room.
‘If you’re tired I understand’ Sydney said to him.
‘No, its fine’ Cam said, ‘just let me have a shower first.’

Cam was unable to have a shower in peace as Sydney joined him shortly after, stepping in without invitation and kissing Cam. Cam held Sydney back, as the warm water continued to rain on both of them.
They wrapped towels around their waists as they walked down the corridor, heading back to Cam's room. Around them, everything was silent.
Sydney entered the bedroom, and Cam closed the door behind them, before turning to him.
Sydney had dropped his towel, standing there completely naked. Cam couldn't help but smirk. He did the same, pulling his own towel free and allowing it to fall on the floor as he approached Sydney.
He kissed him, pushing him back on the bed.
Sydney let out a moan as Cam slipped his fingers in, preparing him.
'Shh' Cam spoke calmly. 'We don't want to wake the others.' He took a corner of the blanket, pressing it against Sydney's lips. 'Bite on that' he told him. 'It will keep you quiet.'
Sydney did so, and Cam pushed himself inside Sydney. Sydney's moan was muffled by the blanket.
'God you feel so good' Cam whispered, thrusting into Sydney, his pace fast. 'I love the feel of your skin…'
Sydney pulling the blanket out of his mouth then, grasping onto Cam, holding him around the back of the neck.
He pushed Cam off him then, rolling on top of him, and kissing him again.
'Don't finish so soon' he whispered seductively to Cam as he straddled him. 'I want to savour this moment….'

Afterwards, they slept together, and Cam slept without interruption. But that night he dreamed a strange dream, as he remembered something that had happened to him a long time ago.

Cam lifted his head as the torturers returned to him.
'So' one of the men said sauntering into the room, 'what should we do next?'
Cam stared hard at the speaking man, clenching his jaw.
'You're both cowards' Cam said to them. 'You are nothing.'
One of the guards snarled, instantly rising to the bait.
He stepped forwards, punching Cam hard in the face with his right hand, his ringed hand. Cam felt the cold hard touch of the blue ring against his skin, taking more of his magic. Cam experienced the same feeling of weakness and fatigue, his head beginning to spin as there was left on his cheek blood where the edges of the ring had cut him.
He began to cackle hysterically, feeling a strange tingling, throbbing sensation at the back of his head, inside his skull.
He fell silent suddenly, raising his head slowly, his hair having grown longer since he left his own world, hanging now over his eyes.
He began to glow. His black hair was lightening until it turned pure white, and his skin glistened like the sun, his clothes too lightened until they had lost almost all their colour.
Cam spoke.
'Die...'

Before him, the two men exploded like bags of water. Blood splattered all the walls, the floor and ceiling. There was little else left of them.
Cam opened his eyes, having closed them to stop blood getting into his eyes; He calmly looked down to the binds around his arms and legs, the metal pieces that held him to the chair.
The metal began to buzz, vibrating at high frequency.
They shattered suddenly, crumbling into tiny pieces.
Cam rose to his feet, wiping the blood from his eyes. He was covered.
His attention turned then to the broken rings on the floor, the blue stone shattered like glass.
The magic released from the rings returned to him once more, and despite the torture and hours perhaps even days without food or water, Cam felt stronger, more powerful than he had ever done before.
He felt alive.
Cam breathed in deeply, tasting the blood in the air at the back of his throat. He glowed brighter now, like a celestial being. His glowed so bright, that he appeared only as a silhouette. His hair, skin and clothes were indistinguishable from one another, even his eyes glowed now. He was pure white now.
'That was very impressive. Good job.'
Cam glanced to the masked female who stood beside him, there was not a drop of blood on her.
He looked ahead again, ignoring this figure, and making his way to the door, which crumbled to dust before him, along with the walls either side.
The broken fragments of the wall, the rubble and the shards of the door and the metal of the hinges and lock, swirled in the air behind him, following after him as he made his way forwards.
The building began to break apart around him, and before he reached the end of the corridor, where the door used to be, he felt the touch of the sun, saw the blue sky above him.
He stopped. There were dead bodies all around him, broken men that were killed when Cam tore the building apart. At a distance the caged prisoners stared in shock and disbelief at what they were seeing. But they were too far away to be in danger from him.
There were shouts nearby, guards hollering and running around, shouting orders.
Cam slowly turned his head towards the disruption, seeing a band of men riding towards him from another building some distance away.
Cam's eyes flickered to the ground.
The earth began to shake; great crevasses appeared in the ground, growing away from him. Rolling clouds began to swell in the sky above, black and heavy with rain. The sky began to crack as lighting forked through the clouds. The wind swirled like a hurricane around the prison, as sleet whipped the faces of the men.

He woke early the next morning, eyes wide, heart beating in his chest. He sat up, hand going to his head, brow furrowed.
Why am I remembering that…? Why now?
He glanced down to his side, seeing Sydney fast asleep beside him. He couldn't help but smile, reaching out to him, caressing his cheek tenderly.

Sydney groaned, snuggling into the blankets further, though he didn't wake.
Cam got up and dressed, leaving Sydney where he was to rest.
He went to get breakfast. It was quiet on their floor, only Elaina was awake, sitting at the breakfast table now.
'Morning' she smiled to him.
'Morning' he replied.
He sat with her, and they ate together.
'Did you sleep well?' she asked him sweetly, beaming at him.
'Uh…' Cam scratched his head. 'Yeah…but I had a weird dream. No….it was more of a memory……'
'Of what?' Elaina asked, tilting her head at him.
Cam frowned to himself, hand going to his head, on his left side, where the worm had been put into his ear.
'It doesn't matter' he said dismissively then. 'Forget I spoke.'
One by one, the other members of his team woke, joining them for breakfast.
After this, Cam went with the others (save for Magnet) as they headed to the training grounds.
In the beginning, Cam was made to train separate from the others, for their safety as well as his own, and he would be supervised by them as he trained, and in turn would watch them train. But nowadays, they would train together. It was a wonderful experience for Cam, and he felt more like part of the team, and less of the freak he felt he was in the beginning. They trusted him now, as he trusted them. He did not feel the same fears as he did before, he was stronger now, thanks to them. For the first time in his life, he could truly protect himself, he had mastered his powers.
Never again would he be beaten and raped. Those days were gone.

It was a hectic experience training, there was often a lot of noise and commotion. The other members of his team would practice with guns and close combat weapons like swords and staffs that were infused with magic to fight the monsters. But these weapons were not sentient like the creature called Philosopher that Cam had met, the one that was called Filly for short. The magic was weaker, but substantial to fight many of the monsters they faced.
Sometimes the team trained with targets, sometimes real creatures were released into the pits. The teams, of which were many throughout the facility, trained often, almost every day for hours, and when they were not training or working, they would relax.
They were nearly finished their training, this time with live monsters. Category T.
Cam had just killed the last monster, when the bell rang, the bell that signalled the end of their training.
'Good work everyone' Selye called out, straightening and wiping the sweat from her brow.
'You did great Cam' Elaina said beside him, grinning as she clutched her weapon, a staff infused with magic.
'Thanks Elaina.' Cam couldn't help but smile.
'Looks like we've got some free time' Russel spoke in his booming voice.
'You got that right big guy' Elaina gleamed, leaning against him merrily. She was tiny in size beside him.

‘Why don’t we go visit Magnet?’ Pink suggested, beating his knuckles together. His weapon, his unique weapon, this was too infused with magic.
‘No way’ Selye said to him, ‘not before I’ve had a wash. I feel so sticky.’
‘When is he supposed to be out?’ Sydney asked.
‘He will accompany us on our next mission’ Selye told the others.
‘Let’s hope he doesn’t get shot again’ Pink replied in a flat voice. ‘He probably will.’

The six of them met up again a short time later, they spent their time with Magnet for a few hours before leaving him again, much to his distress.
Cam was just walking out of the building alone when Elaina caught up with him.
‘Hey Cam, wait!’
He paused turning back to her. Cam spent a lot of time with his team, sometimes when he could, he left to be alone. He found that in this world he had less time to read, and hardly read at all nowadays. Most of the time he just wandered the facility and sat alone and thought. He would think of many things.
‘Where do you go on your own?’ Elaina asked him, stopping by his side.
‘Nowhere in particular’ Cam replied meekly. ‘Sometimes I just like to be alone.’
‘You don’t mind if I come with you?’ Elaina asked. ‘We could hang out together… only if you don’t mind.’
‘No that’s fine’ Cam replied.
Elaina smiled then.
‘You miss your own world, don’t you?’
Cam smiled half-heartedly at her. He didn’t reply, and Elaina for a moment looked as if she were about to pursue the discussion but changed her mind.
‘I would just like to be together with you’ she said grasping lightly onto his arm then. ‘Don’t worry’ she added as they began to walk, ‘I’m not falling for you. I know you belong to Sydney.’
Cam laughed awkwardly at this. ‘Thank you for understanding’ he said.
She just smiled back at him. She looked beautiful, with her curtain of black hair, she always dressed in black clothes, black skirt and boots, petite in size she looked like a delicate thing. But Cam knew different. He had seen her in the battlefield, and she was a ruthless as any of them.
‘Let’s go to the gardens’ Elaina suggested. ‘Would you like that?’
‘Sure’ Cam spoke more confidently now, his smile more natural. ‘Let’s do that.’
They walked the gentle path through the facility, a secluded place, a world within this world.
It almost seemed to Cam like the town he had once lived in, in the world known as Bloodsin, but he knew this was different. The people around him were not civilians, they were soldiers, and technicians and doctors and scientists, even those that worked simple jobs in some of the shops selling clothes or food also worked in more important roles elsewhere part of the time.
Elaina and Cam walked for a few moments in silence, eventually coming to one of the gardens, a beautiful place, with large twisting metal structures built for purely artistic purposes. The grounds were very well kept, with barely a blade of grass out of place, the path was free of weeds, and the hedges trimmed back, the flowers in the beds were bright and pretty.

Elaina raised her hand then to wave to a figure, and as Cam glanced around, he recognised Ivan, the doctor that had helped him heal when he first arrived. Ivan waved to them, before moving away. He was tending to the flowers. Like many people here, he had menial tasks to do when he wasn't focusing on his main work, when he wasn't saving lives.
Elaina lowered her hand, gazing away with a smile.
'One thing this place is missing' Elaina said absently as they took a seat together upon a bench out in the open. 'There are no birds here, no butterflies or bees.'
'Does that bother you?' Cam asked turning to her.
'Not necessarily' Elaina replied, 'it's just…unnatural. It reminds me that this facility is not part of the rest of the world.'
Cam watched her closely. Elaina turned to him then.
'You've come a long way since you first came to us.'
'Sig has been pushing me hard' Cam replied. 'I'm only as strong as I am because of him. He pushes me, sometimes too much…pushes me to my limit….' Cam paused then, raising his head. 'But I am stronger because of it.'
He leant forwards, bringing his hands together.
'I owe so much to all of you' Cam mumbled. 'I…just want you to know…'
'We know' Elaina grinned, 'we're glad to have you. Though we've never taken in a stray before.'
Cam smiled warmly at her.
'I…' Elaina began, speaking more tentatively now, 'I know this is selfish of me but…I hope you never leave.' She paused. 'I know you have a home… your old life but…. it's just…' she broke off, falling silent before speaking again. 'You are a part of this team…that masked figure that brought you here…. I'm sure will one day take you away again…. I just…hope you stay as long as possible…though I know its selfish.'
She bowed her head as she spoke. Cam did not respond but continued to watch her silently.
They both looked away then, towards a person passing them by along the path a short distance away. A woman pushing a stroller, the baby inside was gurgling loudly, the mother smiling down upon it.
A silence passed between them, a silence in which neither reacted. They simply looked on, as the woman with the baby passed them by.

Many weeks later, Cam and his team went on a holiday.
Cam was surprised by this when Magnet first informed them, but he told Cam that it was perfectly normal for them to do from time to time. They were allowed a certain number of days off in the year, and the team would often travel to a place together to relax. Even away from the facility and out of missions or training, they chose to remain together. The team were close-knit and were all good friends.
And so, Cam travelled with them by train, to a place not too far away from the facility, a holiday destination, a place owned by the facility itself. It was like a small hotel, open and spacious, and the weather was beautiful. There were places to eat outside, tennis courts, a small bowling alley, even a pool. But on their first day to this place, the team spent the day in a meadow. The building they were staying and the quiet roads nearby could still be seen, but none of the noises could be heard, and it was like a fairy tale, being on the meadow.

‘It feels like being in one of my stories’ Cam said, as he leant back against the single tree in the meadow.
The grass was fairly long, and as they sat, they were nearly hidden by it. They were upon the slight hill now; the air was warm and the cool breeze swayed the grass around them.
Elaina smiled as a pair of butterflies fluttered past her, seemingly chasing each other.
‘Oh, I haven’t been to this place in so long’ she sighed, ‘I forgot how wonderful it is.’
With her was a man that Cam did not know, though as far as he understood, the man was Elaina’s fiancé, and worked as a technician for the organisation.
‘Hey check me out!’ Pink cried suddenly, holding two biscuits over his eyes.
‘Yes, yes very good’ Selye sighed tiredly at him.
‘Here’ Pink said passing her some crabstick. ‘You should try these they’re really good.’
They had brought a picnic along with them instead of eating at the hotel. They had already been at the meadow for several hours, and there was still plenty of food, but hours later, they were still eating, doing so little at a time.
Sydney who was sitting close beside Cam, let out a contented sigh, leaning into him.
Cam bowed his head for a moment, resting his cheek against Sydney.
He looked up then towards the sky, seeing a strange blue shape that looked like a creature of some kind.
‘What is that?’ he asked with surprise.
‘Oh, its Filly’ Elaina smiled, referring to the weapon called Philosopher, Filly as her nickname. ‘Looks like she’s found a new home.’
As they watched, the shape in the sky drew closer to the ground, transforming into the being Cam had first met, the beautiful young woman with black skin and orange hair.
‘She looks so happy’ Elaina smiled, watching as Filly ran down the hill, towards a male figure, her new master.
The two figures embraced, and the master lifted Filly into the air. Behind this man was the rest of his team, relaxing in the sun as Cam’s team were.
‘Hey guys!’
They turned to see Magnet running towards them wearing only swimming trunks.
‘You should try the water’ he gleamed. ‘It’s *divine*.’
There was a slow running stream down the hill a short distance away, and the water which was very deep in places, was crisp and clean and cool.
‘I can’t get Russel to leave the water’ Magnet grinned, ‘he’s having too good a time.’
‘Isn’t it cold?’ Elaina asked him.
‘No way’ Magnet gleamed.
‘I don’t know’ Elaina frowned. ‘Sounds cold to me.’
‘Well why do you see for yourself?’
They went down the hill together, all of them, leaving the food they had brought with they by the tree.
Elaina held the hand of her fiancé as they walked down the hill. Selye walking closely after Magnet, and Cam and Sydney walked side by side.
They came to the bottom of the hill, reaching the edge of the stream where they saw Russel in the water, leaning back against the bank.

As soon as Magnet reached the edge of the waters, he leapt in, splashing everywhere and resurfacing seconds later with a smile, running a hand down his face.
'Come in!' Magnet called out to the others, 'it's gorgeous.'
As Elaina knelt beside the water, touching it tentatively with a hand to feel the temperature, Selye beside them began to quickly undress down to her underwear, jumping in after Magnet. She grabbed him playfully and the two began to wrestle.
'Come on' Sydney said to Cam as he too began to undress down to his boxers.
Sydney slid into the water, turning back to Cam and reaching out to him.
Cam was kneeling by the water now, Sydney reached out to him, grabbing him roughly and pulling him in.
Cam resurfaced, and Sydney immediately leapt onto him. Cam laughed, hugging Sydney back as Sydney clung onto him tightly, each in the others embrace.
Upon the edge of the bank, Elaina sat down with her fiancé, deciding the water was too cold. Pink sat a short distance from them, watching the others in the water and continuing to eat the food he had brought with him.
'I love moments like this' Sydney sighed as they leant against the bank huddled together, watching Magnet and Selye swim together, as Russel on the other side of the river leaning against the opposite bank, resting contentedly.
'Yeah' Cam mumbled, 'it's nice.'
Sydney glanced up at Cam who held him gently.
'You could smile a little more' Sydney told him.
'I will smile when I have a reason to' Cam replied.
Sydney let out a sigh, resting his head against Cam's chest.
'I love moments like this…' Sydney mumbled. 'I hope things never change.'

It was many weeks after that, when the team was ordered to embark on another mission.
'This one's going to be dangerous' Magnet warned the others as they prepared their weapons. 'Keep your minds sharp and your eyes focused.'
Cam glanced up at Magnet as he spoke, continuing to load his gun. Around him the others were doing the same, working quickly. They knew their weapons well, and the guns and swords infused with magic that they used to many of them, were extensions of their own bodies. Many felt incomplete without their weapons by their side, even when they were not out on a mission.
'What is our goal?' Cam asked Magnet.
'There is an abandoned facility a few hundred miles from here,' Magnet replied in a serious tone. 'We believe that it used to belong to 'Delta', but that has not been confirmed.'
Delta was the name of another organisation, much like this one that Cam had found himself in. But they were a different organisation, and much conflict happened between the two facilities. It was believed that 'Delta' was responsible for the presence of many of the monsters they fought, but they had always denied this.
'I will tell you more on the train' Magnet said hastily. 'We have to go quickly…. we believe there is a category A present…'

Upon hearing these words, the other members of the team froze, and silence rang.
‘Are you serious?’ Pink voiced, speaking in panic.
‘These are only reports which are unconfirmed’ Magnet answered.
‘But a category A?!’ Pink cried out
‘How bad can they be?’ Cam asked.
‘I hope to god you…or the rest of us…. never meet one’ Pink replied. ‘They have god-like powers…’
‘God-like?’ Cam repeated, straightening up and staring back at Pink who suddenly averted his gaze. ‘Surely you jest.’
‘There is nothing to jest about’ Russel spoke up, lifting his heavy gun. ‘They are truly evil demons, who take pleasure in suffering…. they are satanic….and…apart from their power, what makes them even more dangerous is their intelligence.’
Cam tilted his head silently at Russel, as Sydney nearby appeared to be worried, shifting slightly.
‘They are something else’ Russel continued, ‘I don’t think that even you could stand against one.’
‘I’ve come a long way’ Cam spoke calmly to Russel. ‘I can use more of my magic, and I’m more controlled.’
‘No, he’s right’ Selye said. ‘Category A’s are creatures with power beyond anything else that exists in this world.’
‘Then how do you fight them?’ Cam asked turning to her.
‘We don’t’ Selye replied. ‘We can contain them for a short time using special methods that disorientate them. But we cannot fight them. Even to just face one is incredibly dangerous…one wrong move and you could die in an instant.’
Cam turned away, bowing his head.
‘Why is a category A suddenly appearing?’ Cam asked. ‘They are supposed to be rare.’
‘They are’ Magnet replied. ‘That’s what we’re going to find out. I will tell you all more when we get on the train.’
The team began to one by one drift from the weaponry.
‘If anything does happen’ Magnet said to Cam as they headed towards the door, ‘we want you to stay protected.’
‘I don’t understand’ Cam shook his head.
‘This is a serious’ Magnet replied, ‘we are alone here. There are no other teams helping us. No back up.’
‘But why?’
‘Because we are the best for the job’ Magnet replied, ‘and Sig does not want extra casualties if we do run into the category A.’
Cam blinked at him, lowering his eyes.
‘I understand’ he replied solemnly, and Magnet nodded.
‘Come on’ Magnet said moving away from the door. ‘Let’s go.’

It was just a short drive to the station, and the team rode in silence. As Cam glanced around, he saw that all of the others appeared to be nervous.
He looked back down to his lap, swallowing the lump in his throat.

When they reached the station at last, they boarded the train quickly, carrying their equipment, their weapons and gear with them.
The train was empty, carrying only cargo. There were no seats, just empty carriages full of crates.
'So, what do you think is in these boxes?' Selye asked, placing her hands upon one and running her fingers along the wood.
'Anything from food to computer parts' Magnet replied, as Russel behind him drew shut the sliding door, slamming it loudly.
Cam sat on the floor at the back of the carriage, watching the others before him. Sydney went over to sit next to him, and side by side they watched silently.
'You know it's really beautiful out there' Pink was saying, opening one of the small windows in the carriage and leaning out. 'It's getting dark really quick.'
'Well don't fall out before we get there' Elaina told him with a laugh, 'we want to minimise casualties as much as possible.'
Pink leant back from the window, but he didn't move away from it, he stayed leaning on the sill with an elbow, letting the breeze lift his bright pink hair.
The carriage rocked slightly as Russel sat heavily down on the floor, his large frame took up a lot of space.
A few moments later, the train began to move. The few workers that were on the platform loading a few more crates onto one of the carriages, closed the doors then, moving back from the train and lingering like phantoms on the edge of the platform, their silhouette nothing but dark shapes.
Pink leant against the edge of the window, watching with a smile on his face the strange figures that hung there.
The train began to moving, gradually increasing, until it reached a constant speed.
'I love the night' Pink breathed, 'it's so peaceful…'
Magnet who had been pacing back and forth slowly, sat heavily upon one of the crates now, his legs dangling above the floor as he leant forwards with his elbows on his knees. He spoke.
'I um…I'll tell you the rest of what Cid said to me' he began, speaking to the entire team. 'We are going to an abandoned facility were a mass of creatures has been recorded. It is speculated…by Cid and the experts, that there is a source from which they are appearing from, a nest maybe…'
'Do you know where these creatures come from?' Cam voiced suddenly, speaking loud and clear. 'I have been fighting these monsters for the longest time, and no one has ever told me where they come from.'
Silence rang from the carriage.
'We don't know where they come from' Elaina voiced. 'We have no idea. They just appear.'
She was sitting on the floor a short distance from Selye, Russel who was sitting by the door of the carriage listened in silence, arms folded, head bowed and eyes shut.
'It has been speculated that they came from space, as ridiculous as that might sound at first' Elaina continued. 'Many originally believed that there was a comet that fell to earth, and that all the creatures came out of that comet, but that theory has since been dismissed. It was then speculated that they came from this world, created by humans perhaps, but that theory has never held much support.' She frowned thoughtfully to herself. 'We now think that the

monsters do not even come from this world at all, but from another, through a portal perhaps, like yourself' Elaina smiled to Cam. 'Your sudden appearance has opened more doors than you know' she said to him. 'Our scientists are now studying things they never thought possible before…never even seriously considered.'
Cam raised his head then, frowning slightly. He began to feel a little uncomfortable as he realised all their attention was on him, even Sydney who sat beside him watched him closely.
'So, um…' Cam began, in an attempt to divert their attention. 'This category A…'
'Oh…' Russel groaned loudly. 'You had to go remind us.'
'If such a creature has been reported at this facility, then there must be something going on' Elaina voice.
'Yeah but why us?' Russel grumbled.
'Because we are the best' Selye answered simply.
'The best…' Russel echoed, '…and expendable.'
They said nothing in response to this.
'Do you think we are going to die?' Pink spoke suddenly, after a few moments of silence.
'Shhh' Selye hissed at him. 'Don't say such things.'
'Let us talk about the mission' Magnet spoke firmly, getting them back on track. 'We have to keep our minds focused.'
'Finally, someone talking sense' Sydney laughed humorously. 'Go on then' he prompted Magnet, 'what do you have to say?'
The others turned their attention onto him, waiting expectantly.
'Our mission is simple' Magnet voice. 'We clear the area and kill the category A. Cid informed me that sources say there may be clues within the abandoned facility, something that tells us what we need to know and where the monsters have come from.'
'Wait are we seriously going to try to kill it?' Elaina worried.
'Yes' Magnet replies gravely. 'We will at least try.'
There was silence for a time.
'Maybe that's why the category A is present' Russel voiced, breaking the silence at last. 'Perhaps it is protecting something.'
'Mmm' Magnet mused. 'That was Cid's speculation also.'
'Then perhaps there is something there' Selye voiced.
'Ugh' Pink groaned, hand going to his head. 'We're gonna die.'
'Don't say such things' Elaina said angrily.
Pink moved away from the window, sliding the glass closed and turning back to the compartment. He moved over to sit beside Elaina.
'I reckon there is defiantly something over there' he said with a sigh, 'but it's going to be a long journey' he said, stretching and yawing, he lay back on the floor of the carriage with his hands behind his head.
'We are having trouble with this other organisation' Magnet warned the others, though he was looking at Pink when he said this.
'Other organisation?' Cam voiced.
Magnet tilted his head at him. Cam watched him expectantly, before glancing away towards the others. Cam suddenly realised that the others looked tense, they were frowning, their brows furrowed, their lips pursed.

‘Tell me about this other organisation’ Cam spoke firmly.
‘They are controversial’ Selye spoke up then, ‘their methods are not like ours.’
‘They are a very large organisation’ Magnet spoke up, ‘they are much larger than our own, and are made up of…smaller organisations.’
‘Ok’ Cam said expectantly.
Magnet frowned then. ‘They have done a lot of good’ Magnet said, ‘but their methods are reckless.’
‘They are made up of smaller organisations’ Pink voiced. ‘They often disagree with each other’s methods’ he said, ‘and fight among themselves.’
‘Let us not speak’ of them Selye spoke harshly. ‘I don’t want anything to do with them.’
‘You don’t like this other organisation?’ Cam queried.
‘We clash a lot’ Magnet explained. ‘Our methods are not…. compatible’ he finished.
‘You probably won’t ever meet them’ Pink said.
‘Or maybe you will’ another voice spoke suddenly.
Cam glanced around, seeing then the plague masked figure standing in the corner.
He blinked, and then the figure was gone. None of the others had heard it.
Cam let out a sigh, leaning back against the wall behind him.
‘Its going to be a long trip’ Magnet sighed, closing his eyes.
The others had not seen the figure.
Cam put it from his mind. He hugged his knees to his chest, resting his cheek against his knees and becoming still.
‘A long trip’ Cam mumbled, ‘a long way to go.’

The sky was dark outside by the time the train at last slowed to a stop. Cam who had been dozing where he sat jolted awake suddenly, glancing around him as the others stood and straightened up. Beside him Sydney rose, stretching his muscles.
‘It’s time to start’ he mumbled.
They got off the train, one by one. The platform was completely silent. As Cam left the carriage, he was able to see his surroundings more clearly now.
The platform appeared to be deserted, around them was nothing, but overgrown wilderness where the grass reached high. There were mountains far in the distance, and before them, barely visible through the darkness, were several massive buildings set together, it looked almost like a town, but even at this distance it was clear that something was a little off.
‘Is that the facility?’ Cam asked.
‘Yeah it is’ Magnet said, shouldering his gun with a frown.
‘Its sort of peaceful,’ Elaina smiled, ‘isn’t it?
‘Don’t be fooled’ Pink said, ‘it’s just the calm before the storm.’
Cam glanced back at him.
‘Alright’ Magnet said, ‘let’s go.’
One by one they jumped off the platform, wading through the tall grass towards the facility.
Cam who trailed after them slowed to a stop, tilting his head back towards the facility before them.
‘Hey Cam, are you alright?’

Cam looked back towards Sydney.
‘It’s nothing’ Cam mumbled, marching forwards. ‘I’m coming.’
‘It’s this way’ Magnet said after a time, turning back to them.
The others gathered around him, staring down into the darkness before them.
There were a set of stairs descending into the earth, a tunnel underground. The area at the top of the stairs was surrounded by concrete, hidden by the long grass.
‘Looks kinda ominous’ Selye mumbled.
‘You’re not scared, are you?’ Russel spoke in his loud voice.
‘As if’ Selye sneered, lifting her weapon.
‘This path leads straight to the facility’ Magnet told them.
Cam stared down into the darkness before him with dead eyes. He blinked slowly.
‘Are we ready?’ Magnet asked the others.

It was pitch black inside the tunnels, but Cam lit their way. Walking ahead of the others, his body glowing, emanating a pure white light.
They walked in silence for several minutes, Cam eventually slowing to a stop when their path opened before them.
‘I think we’re here’ Cam spoke in a grumble.
They were in an open space now, great pillars were around them, stairs leading up and platforms overlooking them. The area though was deserted, save for them.
‘What a strange place’ Cam mumbled.
‘Hey’ Elaina spoke softly, ‘there’s a light up there.’
They raised their heads, looking upwards towards one of the higher places, where the stairs led to higher levels.
‘There are lights up there’ Elaina whispered.
‘Where are the creatures?’ Pink asked. ‘Something feels wrong.’

Interlude start

A group of men, doubling in number those that had kidnapped Amaia, lay in wait some distance down the road.
‘They’re heading this way’ one of the scouts said to their leader who was named Tristan. ‘They’ll be here in minutes.’
Tristan rubbed his palms together nervously, signalling behind him to indicate the other men to keep silent. The horses that had carried them stood further back, hidden from view from the road. They shifted, ears twitching and nickering to each other. The men were lying in wait

upon the lip of the hill, a spot Tristan had chosen that overlooked the road. A fine place for an ambush.
Tristan glanced up to the small hill opposite him on the other side of the road, seeing more of his men crouched low. Their dark green and brown mottled clothes they wore broke up their silhouettes and deemed them near enough invisible in the forest.
'Excellent' Tristan muttered to himself. He took a deep breath, speaking to the archer beside him.
'Now listen very carefully.'
The archer's eyes instantly glazed over.
'You are to aim for the rider who has her. Aim to kill him. But do not hit the girl. I repeat, do not hit her.'
'Understood your highness.'
'They should be here within seconds' Tristan went on; glancing down to the road in the direction the riders were expected to arrive from. 'Keep a sharp eye, and do not hit the girl.'
'Understood your highness' the archer repeated.
Tristan tensed suddenly, crouching low as he heard the sound of horses approaching.
'Here they come' he whispered to the archer beside him who crouched low as Tristan had done. 'Are you ready?' Tristan asked as the archer pulled an arrow from his quiver.
The archer nocked the arrow, drawing back the string with a muscular arm and perfect position.
'Be careful' Tristan reminded. 'And don't hit the girl.'
The riders were drawing closer, coming into view and travelling fast.
The archer narrowed his eyes, searching for the rider who had Amaia.
Spotted.
The riders approached the ambush and ran past. The archer rose from his position swiftly, waiting a split second before releasing the arrow.
The finest archer in the kingdom did not often miss his target. The man fell dead from his horse, and for the first time, the girl he carried could be seen clearly.
Tristan's heart froze as he saw her, and for a moment words were lost to him as the riders below them began to panic and scatter in confusion and alarm. And then Tristan remembered himself. Rising and standing tall he lifted his sword, crying out the signal to attack.
A great swarm of men descended upon the unsuspecting riders and slaughtered them. Most were killed by the archers before swords clashed, and by the time it was over, Tristan had not lost a single man.
He panted heavily, brow beaded with sweat as he looking about him, realising it was all over.
'Good work men' he called. 'And good work Cyan.'
The archer who had shot the first man gave a nod mutely to Tristan.
Tristan held his breath again, growing evermore nervous as his sights rested upon the frightened girl, sitting upon the giant black stallion.
He wanted to rush up to her, and sweep her up in his arms, and tell her everything was alright. But he dared not scare her further.
'Poor child' he whispered as she trembled. 'We did not intend for you to see such violence. But it was the only way.'

He had planned ahead of time however, for a friendly presence to greet her and make her feel safe and at ease. A woman.
‘Beatrice!’ he called. ‘Beatrice?’
‘I'm coming my lord’ came a female voice.
A plump woman came plodding over the lip of the hill, struggling down to the road below she made her way laboriously towards the horse Amaia sat. Stepping over the dead bodies with distain in her expression, she moved holding the bottom of her skirt up so that it wouldn’t get brushed in blood. She stopped beside the stallion, smiling widely up at Amaia as the beast stood still.
‘Hello child. There’s no need to be afraid, we are not here to hurt you. We are your friends.’
‘Where’s mother?’ Amaia sobbed, her voice breaking.
‘Shhh’ Beatrice cooed. ‘Poor baby. Come down from that horse. I’ll look after you.’
Amaia did not have time to protest however, as Beatrice stood on her tip toes to lift Amaia off the horse, holding her under her arms.
Amaia was placed on the ground, staring up uncertainly at the fat smiling face of this stranger.
Tristan approached from behind Beatrice, staring intently down at Amaia in a way she didn’t like.
‘Gods you look just like your mother’ he breathed. ‘Amaia…’
‘Do not worry child’ Beatrice told her, taking her hand and leading her away. ‘You will be taken somewhere safe and looked after.’
‘I want to go home’ Amaia pleaded. ‘Where is father?’
‘No dear’ Beatrice said to her. ‘I'm afraid you can’t go back home. It’s not safe for you.’
Tristan watched as Beatrice led Amaia away, escorted silently by several of his men, armed with swords and bows. They mounted their own horses, chestnut mares.
‘Be careful’ he told all of them. ‘Get there quickly and safely, and don’t stop for anything.’
‘Don’t worry my lord’ Beatrice said back to him, sitting atop a horse with Amaia in the saddle before her. ‘She’s in safe hands now.’
Tristan watched the small band ride away, feeling a sense of longing, and a strong desire to follow them. But he had other concerns.
‘Your highness.’
The voice snapped Tristan out of his thoughts.
‘Yes?’ he replied to one of his scouts.
‘There is something you might want to see further down the road, in the direction the riders came from.’
Tristan mounted his pure white mare, setting off down the road he followed the scout. When he reached the place, there was sorrow in his heart. A dead soldier lay there, his face covered by a helmet, and further down the road, a woman who had been murdered.
Tristan shook his head, dismounting to examine the dead soldier briefly. He had no injuries on him, and nothing to indicate what might have killed him.
‘How do you think he died?’ a scout, one of several that examined the body asked.
‘I've seen this before’ Tristan replied solemnly, ‘people dropping dead for no obvious reason.’ He stared down at the man. ‘My mother has done this to people herself, before she…’ he broke off.

‘What happened to him?’ the scout asked.
‘His heart’ Tristan went on, ‘has frozen.’
‘Frozen?’ the scout exclaimed. ‘How could such a thing happen?’
Tristan glanced sadly at the woman lying further down the road.
‘They must have thought Amaia did this.’
He approached the woman lying on her back, sorrow overflowing within him.
‘Tragic’ he said. ‘It’s so tragic; to see one so innocent, suffer such a cruel end.’
The wound in her chest had stopped bleeding, and the blood was beginning to crust.
‘She’s so beautiful’ Tristan sighed gloomily.
He bowed his head, sending over her a quick prayer, so that her soul might reach the afterlife with ease.
‘Come’ he said abruptly to his men when he was done. ‘We should leave.’

Cyan sat upon the slope of the hill, gazing down upon the road before him as the group of men slowly rode away on their horses. The small child Amaia being led away by the woman who cared for her, taking her under her wing. The child was crying.
‘Oh…Amaia…’ Cyan sighed, ‘you do not deserve this pain.’
He leant back against the tree, holding his knee, his bow resting on the ground by his side.
‘Your story is an interesting one’ Cyan smiled to himself, ‘we will all be watching you and your family very closely.’

Interlude end

The team wandered through the facility, glancing about them tentatively as they went. It was strange, although the place had clearly been abandoned long ago and was falling into ruin, certain structures crumbling in place due to neglect, there were still signs of recent activity.
Lights here and there were left on, dim lights set against the wall, lighting the hallways up so that they were barely visible but enough to navigate by. Through the windows the moon’s glow radiated the floor beneath them as they stepped forwards, allowing them to see further.
‘Where are all the creatures?’ Elaina asked after a time, but she was met with only silence.
Eventually they came to a floor close to the lower levels, a vast and empty hall, and here they were met with a strange sight.
Monsters all around them, but they were barely alive.
Magnet knelt beside one of the beasts, staring at it intently. It lay on the ground with its head turned to the side, resting on its cheek.
The creature shifted slightly, letting out a feeble growl.

Pink branched off from the group, walking through a few of the other doors.
‘There’re weird things in there’ he told them after returning. ‘Strange things. I think Cid is right. There are experiments happening here.’
There were bodies, human bodies, perfectly preserved, though they had been dead for a long time.
‘I think we should move on’ Selye commented.
Russel nearby held his gun closer to his chest, Sydney moved further into the room, gazing silently about him.
They moved further into the heart of the facility.
It began to get darker, fewer lights lit their path.
‘Are you sure this is the right way?’ Selye asked Magnet after a time.
Magnet raised his head, eyes dark, holding his wrist before him. The device on his wrist scanning the environment around them.
‘There is a high concentration of monsters ahead’ he said. ‘Keep your wits sharp.’
But when they got there, the place was empty.
‘What the hell is going on?’ Magnet hissed, glaring at his device.
‘This is a trick’ Selye realised, ‘a trap…...oh…’
‘…Shit…’ Magnet whispered, his back facing the others.
The other members of the team were silent now, fear in their hearts.
‘Oh god’ he said, ‘it’s a category A.’
‘Fuck’ Pink uttered.
‘Somethings not right here’ Selye spoke again, her voice shaking. ‘Cam…’ she said, ‘I think this is about you.’
‘Excuse me?’ he asked.
‘You’re an asset’ Elaina told him seriously. ‘Ah shit’ she said, hand going to her head. ‘There were never any monsters here, they just used a false signal’ Elaina said. ‘I think they’re after you.’
‘Why would you say that?’ Cam asked turning to her.
‘I think she’s right.’ Magnet said. ‘These false signals.’
‘We should leave *now’* Russel grumbled. ‘There is no need to face a category A if we do not have to.’
‘No’ Magnet said. ‘We should kill it.’
‘We cannot kill it’ Selye snapped at him.
Sydney glanced nervously towards her.
‘We are here to do a mission’ Magnet insisted. ‘We cannot home empty handed, we have to at least see it, we need to record it.’
‘Ach’ Selye cursed to herself.
‘Hey!’ Cam called to them uncertainly. ‘Where are you going?’
‘Just stay here!’ Magnet called back, rushing after the others. ‘This is too dangerous for you.’
‘I don’t understand.’
‘We cannot let this other organisation get you’ Selye told him.
‘You think they would do that?’ Cam fumbled.
‘Just stay here’ Sydney told him nervously. ‘We’ll come back for you.’
‘But…’ Cam fumbled.

‘Just stay here, you need to be kept safe.’ Magnet turned away. ‘We’ll be back for you I promise.’
Cam hung back, watching as the group he had travelled with moved onwards, leaving him behind.
In no time at all, they were gone, and Cam was left in complete silence.
He gazed about the great warehouse around him, a large fan set high in the back wall spun around and around none stop, creating a thumping sound as it beat the air.
Cam stepped back, shoulders slumped.
It was so quiet and dark in the large place. So glum.
Cam leant against the wall, folding his arms and bowing his head. Nearly an hour passed, and he began to doze off, almost falling asleep where he stood.
The minutes passed in silence. Cam opened his eyes abruptly, as he thought he heard a noise.
He raised his head, becoming a little tense now, and suddenly slightly nervous.
There was definitely something there. Cam frowned as he recognised the sound as footsteps, and they were moving his way.
Cam straightened then, pushing himself off the wall and unfolding his arms, staring towards the direction the footsteps were coming from.
He waited in trepidation, anxious as to what he would see.
And then the owner of the footsteps came around a corner.
It was a young girl, who looked to be about sixteen in age, though was shorter than her age suggested. She dressed in dark clothes and had long black hair.
She paused, noticing him suddenly.
‘Oh’ the young girl said turning to him. ‘I didn’t expect to see you here. Did the others leave you behind?’
Cam didn’t answer, only stared back at her in shock and surprise.
The girl giggled then as if amused by this, hands over her mouth and shoulder hunched. She straightened then, letting her arms drop to her side calmly.
‘My name is Beloved’ she said. ‘I'm the category A.’

Interlude start

Many years ago

The men dragged her to the large vehicle, hauling her inside and slamming the door. There were already several figures waiting inside the vehicle for her, several armed men.
‘Are we all set?’ one of the men asked the driver as the door was closed behind him.
‘Good to go’ the driver replied.
‘How is she?’ another man asked.
The attention of the men within the vehicle all turned onto the girl. She was just nine years old, and very frail. She had not slept for several days and was exhausted.
‘I can’t believe we finally found her’ one of the men said.

There were many within the vehicle which drove now silently on in the night, the town around them utterly still.
‘When was the last time she ate?’ one of them asked.
‘She hasn’t another responded, not for a long time.’
There was a slight bump in the road, and the vehicle jolted as it drove over it.
The bedraggled girl raised her arm automatically, head still hung. The men watched her with confusion.
‘We don’t want to take blood’ the man sitting beside her told her, putting his hand on her and lowering her arm. ‘At least not yet.’
The girl opened her eyes wearily, raising her head as much as she could to look at him.
‘What is her name?’ the man sitting on her other side asked
‘Beloved’ the other man replied, raising his hand and brushing her long blonde hair back. There was blood on her face and hair, but the blood was not her own. ‘We will take her to the lab’ the man continued absently, ‘and begin testing. We have to unlock her powers.’

Weeks passed, and Beloved still was bound to the table by heavy iron shackles.
A heavy metal sheet ran over her eyes, keeping her blind, and she was completely naked as she lay there, her body impaled with several rods and other devices which were attached to her.
Behind the protective window, in the other room, one of the men in the white lab coat turned on one of the switches and Beloved screamed, begging them to stop, begging them to kill her, as the pain was too much. But they would ignore her and continue, as they had done before.
Beside these men, on the other side of the window that looked into the room, several men dressed in black watched in silence. They were assessing her.

Interlude end

Cam gasped in horror, feeling a strike of fear hit his heart like a bolt of lightning. He summoned forth his magic, in all its form, sending it towards her to attack.
The magic hit, but Beloved did not react. She did not even flinch.
It was as if the magic had dissipated before it reached her.
A cruel gleam lit up Beloved’s face then.
‘*My turn*’ she said.
Faster than his eyes could see, Beloved’s hair grew in length and shot towards him. Cam was pinned to the wall behind him and held in place, being struck again and again, the pain tearing through his body. The attack ceased only when he felt a grip tighten around his body, and his feet leave the floor entirely.
He opened his bloodied eyes, seeing the ground grow further away for a brief moment, before he was thrown through the air.

Beloved squealed and clapped her hands in delight, jumping up and down in a very childish manner as Cam was thrown to the ground.
'What fun what fun?!'
Cam picked himself up gingerly, fixing all his attention onto Beloved.
He straightened, his hair and clothes glowing white as the wind picked up around him. He threw all of his magic at her, using all the strength he could muster. But with only a flick of the wrist, Beloved deflected the attack.
And that's when Cam's heart went cold.
'What….?' He uttered, seeing how she had so easily deflected his most powerful attack. 'Oh god…'
'Run little rabbit' Beloved sniggered.
Cam turn tailed and ran, but he didn't get far before he stumbled.
He hit the ground hard as something wrapping around his ankle. Cam had a close view of the dirt on the floor, before he was pulled sharply back and into the air.
He cried out in fear as he was held upside down in the air by one of Beloved's thick strands of hair that had wrapped itself around his ankle. He stared up helplessly at the ground above him, and at Beloved, smiling widely, as if she were only greeting a friend.
Cam felt a sharp pull then as he was suddenly thrown through the air and into stack of oil drums piled high. He felt the pain as they landed on top of him, toppling from their places with an almighty crash.
He struggled to free himself, clawing his way out of the stack of heavy drum.
He could feel the bruises already forming on his body, the aches and pains growing everywhere.
Cam dared a glanced behind him, seeing the nightmare simply waiting for him.
Beloved waved at him happily, swaying on the spot and tapping the floor with the tip of a foot.
Cam groaned, the fear flickered within him, but it didn't go away.
He was grabbed again as he made to escape, drawing onto his magic again as he was lifted into the air once more.
Beloved did not even bother to deflect his attacks. His spells reached her, but they had no effect, whatsoever. He may as well have thrown a glass of water at her, for all the good it did.
She held him in the air, savouring the moment, before throwing him again.
Cam picked himself up off the floor, clutching his chest and groaning. He spat blood and teeth, hand going to his mouth as he began to shake violently.
'No!' he cried as Beloved grabbed him again. 'No more!'
He was rolled onto his back then, staring up at Beloved as she stood over him.
She cocked her head playfully at him, before Cam felt a great pressure around his upper arm.
He stared up at Beloved, completely in her powers, completely helpless.
He could only wait for what she would do.
Cam screwed his eyes tight shut, gritting his teeth together, as he felt a great pull on his arm.
He screamed as his arm was pulled out of its socket, the pain so great, it was too much to bear, as a white light enveloped his vision.
The glow was quickly sapped from him as his hair returned to its black and his clothes to their original shade.

Beloved cackled hysterically, lifting before her the limb she had torn from him.
'I guess you won't be needing this anymore!' she gleamed, speaking to him briefly, before lifting the bloodied end to her mouth and beginning to eat it, devouring the entire thing in several seconds. Cam's entire arm went down her throat.
She moaned in pleasure then, licking the blood from her fingers and around her lips.
'Mmmm….delicious….'
Cam lay there, no longer trying to flee, too weak from pain and shock and blood loss, he lay there…as his life began to ebb away, as he began to bleed out.
No……Luke……please……
He felt a weight on his chest then, as Beloved sat on him. She turned his head to face her, holding him almost tenderly.
'Naaaawwww' she whined. 'Don't tell me you've given up already. It's just a limb. You've got three more.'
Cam's breath was shallow. Blood gushed from his shoulder.
The last thing Cam saw before he blacked out was Beloved, bending down and licking up the fresh blood that pooled around his body.

The next experience that Cam was aware, was slowly waking.
There was a voice near him, a kind and gentle voice, though it took Cam several seconds to realise this voice belonged to an ally. It took him several seconds to realise that he recognised this voice.
His mind was slow, sluggish. Painful.
'Cam.' The voice spoke slowly and clearly. 'Cam. Can you hear me?'
Cam opened his eyes. He recognised the surroundings as being those of the hospital wing. The doctor Ivan was leaning over him, with the nurse Bee by his side.
'Are you alright Cam?' Ivan said. 'How do you feel?'
'Why…?' Cam mumbled, forcing himself to speak, his throat felt dry. 'Why am I here?' he blinked slowly. 'What happened?'
'You suffered a traumatic event' Ivan told him carefully. 'You've been in a drug-induced coma for several days.'
Cam barely understood him.
His mind began to wander.
His breath began to quicken as he remembered, his brow furrowed and body tensed.
He looked down at his body, heart seizing in his chest and vision clouding over as he began slipping into shock.
'Oh god' he uttered, turning his head away from what he had seen.
'Cam!' Ivan called, placing a plastic piece over his mouth quickly. 'Stay with me.'
Cam breathed heavily through the plastic that covered his nose and mouth, breathing in the gasses, and slipping back into unconsciousness.

He woke sometime later.
This time only the nurse was present.
‘Cam’ came her gentle voice. ‘Cam.’
Cam turned his head towards her. Bee smiled back at him.
‘Hey’ she said encouragingly. ‘How are you feeling?’
‘What a stupid question’ Cam slurred.
‘You're lucky to be alive’ Bee told him, not in the slightest bit put off by his tone. ‘There are very few who can stand up against a category A, and none who can do so alone.’
‘Is that supposed to make me feel better?’ Cam uttered. ‘She would have killed me…’
‘Our people managed to chase her off’ Bee told him. ‘But she still lives.’
Cam turned his head away from her, looking back to his left side.
His entire arm was missing from the socket.
There was nothing left.
Cam stared long and hard, feeling a deep cloud of depression and unreality descend upon him.
Bee waited for a long while, waiting for Cam to react.
At long last, Cam turned away and looked back at Bee.
‘I was not able to hurt her’ Cam spoke in a mumble, ‘I was not even able to protect myself…….’ he trailed off then. ‘I thought I was strong…. I thought my power….’
‘Category A’s are rare’ Bee told him. ‘They are in a whole league of their own. Many believe that they come from hell itself.’
Cam said nothing.
‘I will leave you alone now’ Bee said to him moving away. ‘You can join the others when you are ready.’

They came to visit him shortly after, all of them.
‘Oh Cam!’ Sydney cried with tears in his eyes. ‘I'm so sorry…’
He held Cam’s head in his hands, kissing him deeply. Cam did not react to him. Sydney stepped back, trembling at the shock of everything.
Selye pushed past the others, moving closer to him, placing a hand upon Sydney’s shoulder.
‘Don’t smother him’ she shot at Sydney. ‘Can you see he needs his space?’
Sydney stepped back further, tears spilling down his cheeks. He turned and fled from the room, unable to control himself.
Selye turned back to Cam, speaking tenderly.
‘Are you alright?’
Cam didn’t answer; his vision was blurred with tears as he stared back at the others, Selye, Magnet, Pink, Elaina and Russell, as they surrounded his bed.
Selye, closest to him, tilted her head, watching Cam silently as tears ran down his cheeks.
Cam let out a sob, reaching out to grab her and pulling her close in a hug, holding her with his one arm.
His body began to shake uncontrollably.
‘It’s alright’ Selye answered calmly. ‘Everything’s alright now.’
‘I'm sorry…’ Cam could only say. ‘I'm sorry…’

She held him back with her muscular arms, holding him tightly before breaking away. Beside them Russell was blinking back tears.
'I'm so glad you're alright!' Russell blurted out suddenly. 'What were you thinking?' his voice turned angry then. 'Facing a category A?!! You should have tried to run!'
'I did' Cam whispered. 'I didn't realise at first what she was…she just looked like a little girl…of only sixteen.'
'They are monsters!' Russell snapped angrily back, grabbing him roughly. 'They are evil demons who *enjoy* hurting people!'
'I know that now' Cam answered calmly, the tears beginning to cease.
Cam's breath began to quicken slightly as Russell's grip on his shoulder tightened. He was a large man, with large hands and strong grip.
'Russell.' Cam spoke calmly. 'You're hurting me.'
'Don't you ever…' Russell spoke in a trembling voice, his grip tightened, and Cam's muscles around his eyes twitched in pain, teeth gritted. 'Don't you die' Russell said. 'Do not die.'
The seconds passed as the two locked in stares. Magnet glanced from each of them to the other and back again.
'Russell' he spoke up at last. 'Let Cam go.'
Russell did so, turning on his heel and striding away without further explanation. He left the room.
'I'm sorry' Magnet explained. 'He may have a funny way of showing it, but he really does care deeply about you, as he does for all of his team. He took is especially hard when Earnest died. Don't judge him badly for it.'
'Sure' Cam said, bowing his head and rubbing his shoulder. 'I understand.'
'I'm glad you're well' Elaina spoke up. 'But…when will you be leaving the hospital wing?'
'I don't know' Cam said.
'I'm sure you need time to adjust' Elaina said. 'It must not be easy.'
She reached forward, brushing his black hair back out of his face.
'Your hair is getting long' she noted. 'You should cut it.'
'Fine' Cam grumbled.
'You know' Elaina spoke up, 'I have something to show you, it seemed appropriate at this time.'
She lifted her long skirt, and Cam turned his head towards her.
His eyes widened.
'It's as good as the real thing' Elaina told him moving closer. 'I lost my leg to a monster attack a few years ago. I nearly died.'
Cam sat up, reaching forwards to touch her knee. The metal felt cold beneath his fingertips, cold, but not unwelcoming.
'I…' Cam began, suddenly lost for words. 'I had no idea you…'
Elaina smiled then. 'That's the idea. I'll admit it took a while to get used to it. It is made of metal after all. The false leg is a lot heavier than the real one. But…' she said dropping her skirt again, 'the body adapts. It always does.'
'So, you're saying I could have a new arm?' Cam spoke hopefully now. 'Metal, like your leg.'
'Better than the real thing' Elaina gleamed happily.

‘It’s nice isn’t it’ Pink winked playfully. ‘I didn’t even know for the longest time she had it, until one time we were training together and she kicked me……it still hurts even now.’
‘Oh, stop being such a baby’ Elaina frowned at him, hands upon her hips.
Cam broke into a smile then, glancing happily from Magnet to Selye.
‘I won’t feel like half a man now’ Cam said unable to stop himself from smiling, blinking tears of joy from his eyes.
‘It will take a few days to make’ Magnet told him, ‘and a lot of paperwork and expense. But no doubt they will be more than happy to do it for you, you are a great soldier after all, you are an asset to us. You are valuable to the organisation.’
‘When?’ Cam asked eagerly.
Magnet shrugged. ‘A week? They need to take certain measurements and all that. It’s a complicated procedure, and your new arm will be built from scratch especially for you. It will take a while to make, and a while to get used to, but you will be yourself…no…*better* than yourself in no time.’
‘Oh’ Cam sighed, resting back again. ‘I can’t wait.’
‘Well’ Selye beamed beside him, ‘now you have something to look forward to.’
She rubbed his arm happily.
‘We’re all extremely glad you're alright. We were all terribly worried for you. For a time we feared the worst.’
‘I'm sorry’ Cam said again.
‘We should leave you alone now’ Selye said. She squeezed his hand briefly before moving away. ‘You’ll be joining us on missions again in no time I just know it.’
‘I hope so.’
Selye nodded, moving away.
Elaina moved forward, kissing him briefly on the cheek before following Selye out of the room.
‘See you around mate’ Pink waved, striding from the room after the others.
Only Magnet was left.
‘Oh’ he said as if he suddenly just realised the others had gone. ‘I'm not kissing you’ he said waving to him. ‘I’ll come in a bit later to visit you ok.’
‘Sure’ Cam nodded. And then he smiled. ‘Thanks for everything’ he said.
Magnet nodded briefly, before leaving.
When Cam was all alone, he leant back in bed, sighing to the ceiling and feeling happier than he had done in ages, despite everything.
Myself again. He thought. *That would be nice…*
His eyes glazed over as he stared up at the ceiling, his mind working.
I love my team so dearly. They are my family, and they care about me.

A few days passed.

‘They said they would have it ready by tomorrow’ Cam said to the others as he tried to eat his food, chicken and rice.

Now he was using one hand to try to cut the chicken. Instead of the chicken cutting, it simply moved back and forth on his plate with the knife wedge in it. Around him, Elaina, Selye, Pink, Magnet, Sydney and Russell were all gathered.
Russell glared at Cam as he spoke.
'They've taken my measurements' Cam went on, moving the piece of chicken around his plate. 'They will finish it today I think. First thing in the morning they will let me have it.'
'Are you excited?' Elaina asked him.
'Yes' Cam said.
'Nervous?'
The edges of Cam's lips twitched slightly as he continued to try to cut his chicken.
'A little' he admitted.
Russell leant forward then, grabbing Cam's fork and stabbing the plate hard, skewering the chicken.
The others froze in surprise then at his sudden move.
Cam bowed his head.
'Thank you' he said, cutting his chicken successfully into pieces now.
'Anytime' Russell said in his deep voice, releasing the fork and sitting back again.
'Just think' Magnet smirked at him, 'the next time we see you, you'll be completely different.'
'Will it change me that much?' Cam frowned then, pausing.
'Oh no he didn't mean it like that' Selye said hastily. 'It's just that…you'll be able to train with us again, but you'll feel different with the extra weight. The mechanical arm is much heavier than the real thing.'
'That's right' Pink said happily, sitting heavily on the bottom of Cam's hospital bed. 'It will take some getting used to. But you will do fine. You'll get used to it in no time. I just know. After everything you've achieved since you've been with us?' he glanced back at Cam with a smile upon his face. 'This is going to be a piece of cake.'

The next morning, Cam lay back on the hospital bed, watching as the doctor Ivan and the nurse Bee milled around him as they prepared.
'Are you ready?' Bee asked him.
Cam's stomach tightened suddenly.
'Yes' he spoke with more surety than he felt. 'I am.'
Bee placed the mask over his nose and mouth, and Cam breathed deeply. In seconds he was under and was fast asleep.
After a gruelling twelve-hour operation, it was finally over.
'Are you ready to bring him around?' Bee asked Ivan.
'Yeah' Ivan replied. 'Give him the drug.'
A few seconds later, Bee gave him the drug that would wake him.
Ivan leant over Cam as he lay there still. He spoke slowly and clearly.
'Cam?'
Cam's muscles around his eye twitched then, and he furrowed his brow.
He opened his eyes, blinking several times, before turning his head to his left side.

Cam sat up, staring at his new arm.
The metal was new and shining, made up of many different components, the workings could be seen, the small pistons inside the arm itself that allowed the arm to bend at the elbow, and allowed the fingers and thumb to bend in the hand. The wrist was made up of several heavy metallic cogs and wires, and on the inside of the hand, on the palm and running down the fingers and thumb, was a hard sort of rubber, formed into ridges for better grip.
Cam blinked at the thing, feeling so strange all of a sudden, the closer he stared at it
He tried to move it, it was awkward, and took a lot of effort and concentration.
'I can move it' Cam said, sounding surprised.
'Yes' Ivan smiled. 'It's *your* arm.'
Cam tried to turn the new arm to the side, it bent at an angle, and he couldn't move the elbow at all in either direction, and he couldn't turn his wrist.
'I can't work it properly.'
'That's normal' Ivan said encouragingly. 'It will take you a while to get used to. You just have to practice.' He smiled at Cam. 'How does it feel?'
Cam thought for a moment before answering.
'Strange' he said at last.
'Of course it does' Ivan beamed happily. 'It will take some time to get used to, its harder to use than a leg of course but…. you'll do fine. Just give it time.'
Cam was left alone shortly after that to recover. The room was silent, and everything was still.
Cam stared at the cup of water on the table before him as he lay in bed.
He stared at it. Thinking.
Cam lifted his new arm. It felt heavy, unnatural and strange.
He still couldn't bend the elbow or work the wrist at all, but he could now flex his fingers.
He reached for the cup and tried to grab it, instead knocking it over.
Cam watched the water spill off the table and onto his lap.
He sat back with a sigh, staring at the wall beside him sullenly, and suddenly wishing there was a window in his room. He wanted something interesting to look at. The sky perhaps, or the pretty garden birds that fed from the feeders put out for them just outside the facility, or the sun setting.
He was happy for his new arm, and was extremely grateful for having it, but was frustrated at how long it was taking to work.
'Stupid thing' he cursed, waving it around hopelessly. 'Why won't it work?'

The next day, very early in the morning, his team came to visit him.
Cam remembered feeling a touch at his shoulder, his name being spoken softly.
He opened his eyes, blinking several times, before raising his head.
He saw Magnet leaning over him with a smile, his hand touching his shoulder.
Magnet straightened up again, drawing his hand back.
'Hey Cam' Magnet said to him. 'How do you feel?'

Cam blinked again, turning his head to the side. He saw standing behind Magnet the rest of his team, Elaina and Sydney and Selye and Pink, and standing behind them, towering over their head, was Russel.
'Hey guys' Cam mumbled, his voice weak. 'How're you doing?'
Sydney rushed forwards then, holding Cam's head firmly and burying his head in his chest.
'I'm so glad you're alright' he sobbed, 'I thought for a minute….' He squeezed him tighter, 'oh gods we should never have left you…'
'Give him space' Selye told him firmly, 'I don't think he wants to be smothered…again.'
Elaina moved around the bed as Russel stepped forwards to get a better look at his new arm.
Elaina stood on the other side of the bed now, reaching out to touch his metallic arm.
'It's beautiful' she gleamed. 'How does it feel?' she asked Cam, raising her head.
'I um….' Cam began uncertainly. 'I cannot use it…very well.'
'In time' Elaina gleamed undeterred. 'In time you will not even notice it's made of metal' she told him. 'It will of course be stronger than a human arm.'
She moved away then to a desk nearby, taking a pen that lay there.
'Here' she said returning to his side and holding it out for him. 'Take it. With your new arm.'
Cam stared at the pen in her hand wide-eyed. He looked down at his left arm.
The others watched in silence as Cam grimaced, brow furrowing in concentration as he struggled to move the prosthetic limb.
He managed to lift it, the limb still bent awkwardly at an angle as he had rested. The arm's movement was very slow, but he managed to straighten his arm. However instead of taking the pen from her, he accidently knocked it out of her hand as he made to reach for it.
Cam stared in surprise at this, then his expression soured.
'Dammit stupid thing' he cursed, grabbing his head with his good hand.
'It's going to take some time' Elaina told him, bending down to pick up the pen. 'Don't get frustrated, you have to be patient. Don't be discouraged.'
'I'm going to be stuck in this bed for who knows how long' Cam complained bitterly.
Elaina only smiled to him sweetly.
'It's not so bad' she told him. 'You will stay here only for a short while until you are healthy again, then you will have time off work to…adjust…' she finished.
Cam raised his head at her.
'The category A tore you up pretty bad' Elaina spoke seriously. 'Your body is still healing.'
'When will I be able to go on missions again?' Cam asked.
'Not until you're ready' Magnet replied.
Cam bowed his head again, sighing.
'You're going to leave me behind…'
'You can come on missions again with us soon enough' Russel said to him. 'In the meantime, we will come and visit you here until you are ready to leave, then you will see us all often in our dorms.'
Cam nodded. 'Don't forget about me you guys.'
'We would never do that' Sydney told him seriously, grasping Cam's right hand tightly, his flesh hand.
'Thanks' Cam smiled weakly. 'I really appreciate everything you all do for me.'

The next day Magnet came to visit Cam, the others were away at that time, so it was just him. Magnet sat by Cam's bed as Cam sat up, using one of those toys that children played with, where you had to fit the shape in the correct hole, stars and circles and moons and squares. These were good exercises for his arm, but also for his mind to, as he worked out how to control his new limb. Cam did these exercises every single day, but the challenge was always different. On another day, he ran a hoop over a twisted wire using his metallic arm, the child's toy buzzing every time he touched the hoop to the wire.
'It's ok' Elaina encouraged as Cam began to get frustrated. 'Try again.'
All around him on this day, the rest of his team watched. They visited him often, and for that Cam was grateful.
He began to feel a strong bond between them, a deep attachment forming. He would have gone so far as to say that he felt love for all of them, like a family.
'Thank you' Cam said, after finishing using the toy before him. 'Thank you guys, for visiting me so much. I really appreciate it.'
They all smiled warmly at that, keeping silent. Only Magnet spoke.
'You are very welcome. Even though I for one am sick of this hospital….being shot so often…I would still come to visit you. We all would, whenever you need us.'

Cam was allowed to leave the hospital wing just a few days later, but he didn't go on another mission for several months, however he trained every single day.

Cam was glad when he was at last able to go on another mission again. He cast his magic out, throwing his head back and laughing out joyfully, the flesh of his skin beginning to glow.
'That is wonderful news!' he declared loudly as around him, his team all grinned widely, they had been eager to hear his reaction to the news. 'I cannot wait to go out into the field again Cam said, 'to be truly myself and to fight. And my arm' he said moving and twisting his metallic arm, flexing the fingers, 'I can work it now, as if it were my own flesh.'

Many months later

Cam was glad to be out again, he had quickly grown tired with the repetitive nature of training, every day that had passed had become more and more dull. But now, he was free again to do what he had to, he felt alive, and wild, now that he had a purpose once more.
But something clung to the back of his mind, the old fear of what he had encountered, of Beloved.
The category A had been nothing what he had thought it would be. A true monster, a demon in disguise. Despite Cam's best efforts, she had overpowered him, had toyed with him.
He had not seen her again since that day, but he knew she was still out there somewhere, she had not been found by his team, the signal that had led them away had been false, and she had escaped before they had found him.

‘Don’t worry’ one of the plague masked figures had said to him after he had gotten out of the hospital wing with his new arm. ‘You will see her again.’
Now he lived every moment with fear in the back of his mind, he continued to fight and kill the monsters, but he feared, that he might meet her again, his fear increased as he turned every corner, entered every room, turned his back. There were times when he felt a twinge of nervousness at having to part from his team, as had to be done occasionally. But he never voiced these fears, not wanting to sound weak or scared.
This time, he was separated from them again, and he crawled now through some narrow pipes, heading out of the building they had first come to, and towards the sea, towards the harbour.
Cam stared ahead of him as he saw a square patch of light in the tunnel, the grate in the centre of the ceiling above. It was night-time now, and Cam saw clearly through his magic, his body set aglow.
He reached the grate, tilting his head back and pushing the grate upwards. He climbed out of the hole, straightening up again. The first thing he experienced was a cool breeze, and the smell of salt in the air.
He was at a dock, ships lined the water, and in the distance, the ocean was calm.
Cam blinked slowly, looking down at the device on his wrist then. They all carried one, everyone who went on missions that belonged to the organisation he served. These devices allowed them to find each other, constantly pinging their location, and Cam saw that his friends were not far away.
They had agreed to meet here, and they were on their way.
Cam let out a sigh, stepping forwards then close to the edge of the harbour.
In the town behind him everything was still, everything was peaceful, and as he stared at the waters below him he saw faint flashes of silver. There were fish in the waters, they moved around the boats tied up.
Everything seemed at first as it should be, but for Cam things were about to change, for this was the night that he was to meet Beloved again.
‘In regards to that mission, the whole purpose of the organisation, Delta, was to feed you false information. Your facility allowed you to be lured out, you were supposed to be apprehended by us…they want you for you power.’
Cam began to tremble in terror as it slowly began to dawn on him, that he recognised that voice. She stepped closer to him, and he shook his head in disbelief, taking a step back away from her, pure and primal fear streaking through his heard.
‘S-stay back!’
‘I’m afraid I didn’t get the memo’ Beloved continued, slowly to a stop and maintaining a good distance between them. ‘The organisation I serve is corrupt, but it’s not evil. It’s made of many little sectors, all working together in a greater machine. But because of this there are differences.’ She paused. ‘You were supposed to be a secret’ she said to him, ‘even I did not know of you, I was not told of the plan. And so that is why I attacked.’
‘Get *away*!’ Cam howled, lashing out with his magic. But like before, the creature Beloved simply waved his magic away like it was nothing.
He was far inferior to her, he may as well have been a worm before an eagle. He knew that he couldn’t even get away, though his instincts compelled him to try nonetheless.

Cam turn tailed and ran, heading back to the town, this time he did not even try to fight. But Beloved caught him, Beloved moved quickly. Her hair grew like long tentacles, as it had before, and she used these to lift herself into the sky, throwing herself forwards. She landed on a knee before Cam as he ran, Cam skidding to a stop.
Beloved straightened, turning to face Cam again.
'My purpose is to find you' Beloved spoke to him calmly. 'Find you and bring you to the organisation I serve, where they will do who knows what with you. It may be difficult, and you probably won't believe me, but their end goal is a true one, even if their methods are not.'
Cam began to sob in fear, body trembling. He barely heard the creature's words, and his mind was fraught with horror as the old memories of their last meeting crashed over him.
He believed he would die at that moment, and there was nothing he could do about it.
Cam took a step back as Beloved reached for him with one of her strange tentacles, made up of her long black hair bound together, tightly knotted, they grew and shrank in length, moving swiftly and nimbly.
One of these black appendages wrapped around Cam's neck, beginning to tighten. Cam struggled to break himself free, his magic lashing out uncontrollably. Beloved sneered then as Cam cut her, just the tiniest graze on her cheek.
She tightened her grip around his throat, Cam's magic failing then, as he resorted to clawing at his neck, fighting to free himself, choking. But lack of oxygen was weakening him fast.
He fell to his knees, vision swimming and darkening as he began to lose consciousness.
Beloved's grip loosened on him then as Cam fell forwards.
She raised an eyebrow, one of her thinner appendages of hair reaching out and breaking the device from Cam's wrist. The tracker. In one quick and easy move and destroyed it, and the signal was lost.
'Your team will never find you' Beloved said to Cam's unconscious body. 'You belong to my organisation now. I wonder what they will do with you.'

The next time Cam woke, he was in a completely new place, and not a welcome one.
By the time Cam's team arrived at the harbour, he was already long gone. The only thing that was left behind was his wrist device, his tracker left in pieces. Beloved had broken the device, casting it aside.
Magnet knelt, picking up the remnants of the shattered device. He straightened then, staring down at the broken pieces in his hand. He blinked slowly, raising his head and gazing about him.
'…. Cam……'

Cam woke some unknown time later, the first thing he experienced was pain.
A familiar sensation.
Cam raised his head, doing so tentatively, his movements gradual.
He was in a standing position, and as he blinked several times, trying to shift his body, he realised where he was.

Cam was in a small room, one that looked like an office or lab or some sorts. As he turned his head to the side, and he realised that he bound were he stood. His arms and legs were bound with heavy metal plates, his legs were splayed and his arms were held open and horizontal.
A dark mist suddenly descended over Cam's eyes then as he looked forwards again, realising his situation.
'Here we are again' a voice spoke suddenly, and as Cam's eyes flickered up and he saw a plague masked figure standing there before him.
'How is it that you seem to find yourself in this sort of position so often?' the figure spoke to him in a male voice. 'How is it that you are tortured so?'
'Do you do this?' Cam gasped, feeling pain within his body, though not knowing where it came from.
'It's not us' the masked figure replied, 'honest. I mean it this time.'
The door opened then, and two figures entered.
Cam raised his head to them, feeling trepidation growing within him.
There was a control panel off to one side, and Cam glanced towards it as one of the men approached it, the other man moving to stand before him, though maintaining a distance.
'What is your name?' the man asked.
'What am I doing here?' Cam gasped.
'What is your name?' the man repeated.
Cam heisted.
'We've known of your existence for some time' the man said to him, as the other began to type furiously on the control panel, 'though we don't know when you first came to be, we don't know of your origins, but like Beloved, we believe that you are not of this world.'
'Beloved?' Cam uttered.'
'The organisation you work for wastes the opportunities you could offer, we could learn so much more from you.'
'They are good to me' Cam spoke in a level voice. 'They are my friends.'
'I'm sure they are' the man said taking a step away. He paused then. 'What is your name?' he said to Cam.
Cam gritted his teeth together, glaring.
'I'm done with you' Cam spoke carelessly. 'I am not giving you anything.'
'Your body shows high readouts of magic within you' the man by the panel informed, turning back to glance at him. 'You could learn so much more about what you are. You could do so much to help this world. We…. are unable to perform examinations on Beloved as we used to, due to…politics of the company.' He paused then. 'She is in the care of another sector now, and a wasted opportunity to learn. Now she simply fights.'
Cam did not reply, instead he stared at the ground now, ignoring the man's words.
'But not you' the man by the panels continued with a smile. 'You belong to us.'
'We want to increase your magic to the fullest' the man standing before him said, as the other who sat before the monitor continued to type away in silence. 'Beloved did give us some information about you. She said that you were strong, but your powers were unrefined. We can help you, but first we need to release your powers to their fullest, as we did with *her*. Like breaking the wall of a dam. It will be difficult for you, but in the end, it will be worthwhile for everyone.'

‘I am giving you nothing’ Cam spoke quietly, not meeting his gaze.
‘I know it was wrong for us to kidnap you and take you away from your home’ the man said, ‘but you are a valuable asset. You could do so much more.’
‘Why have you bound me?’
‘For our own protection’ the man before him answered. ‘Those metal plates that hold you are infused with a powerful chemical.’ He paused. ‘You cannot use magic externally, though you can still use it within your body, you cannot hurt us.’
Cam summoned his magic then, his skin beginning to glow and his hair turning white.
‘Good’ the man smiled calmly. ‘Beautiful.’
‘Let me go’ Cam spoke firmly. ‘I want to return to my home, to my organisation.’
‘We want you to stay here and make a new home in *this* organisation’ the man countered.
‘I will not abandon those who cared for me and showed me kindness for the longest time’ Cam spoke defiantly. ‘You will get nothing from me.’
‘Beloved said the same’ the man answered calmly. ‘She would not be the powerful creature she is if not for us. It is a painful process, but our chemicals unlocked her powers, cells that lay dormant in her flesh, her very blood, her mind.’
‘I have released my powers’ Cam said. ‘I could rip apart this building.’
‘Then why don’t you?’
Cam fell silent.
‘What has happened to your magic Cam?’ the masked figure asked him, completely invisible and unheard by the other figures in the room. ‘You haven’t expended the same magic you did that day you tore apart that building, that day you were tortured, back when that worm was in your ear. Remember how your entire profile glowed like that of an angel? You killed so many people without even a thought. And you survived such an ordeal, when you should have died. But it was your magic that kept you alive, not us. It was yourself, your powers, your will to live and see your brother again.’
Cam bowed his head mutely.
‘What happened?’ the plague masked figure asked him again. ‘What happened Cam? What does it take to be able to use all of your powers? You’ve unlocked them, but they are still out of reach, you were unable to use the full extent of your magic when you faced up against Beloved, when she nearly killed you. What is holding you back?’
‘I will give you nothing’ Cam answered calmly, speaking to the man before him, as the plague masked figure watched from the corner of the room.
‘I thought as much’ the man answered. ‘Creatures like you are always so stubborn. They are all the same it appears.’
‘I am like nothing in this world’ Cam glowered.
‘Ah’ the man smiled warmly then. ‘Are you admitting that you do not even come from this world? So you *are* like Beloved?’
Cam’s eyes widened as the man reached for a large silver switch upon the panel.
‘I know these are empty words’ the man said, ‘but we really do mean well…our end goals, though our methods are not always agreeable.’ He paused for a moment, hand still on the switch before he pressed it. ‘Nothing instils compliance like pain.’
The man pressed the switch then, and Cam’s body immediately contorted, gritting his teeth as electricity coursed through his body.

He groaned in pain as his body continued to convulse, slumping forwards, body limp as the switch was turned off again.
Cam raised his head, eyes mad and wild, consumed by sudden rage.
'Eat shit and die pig-fucker!'
'You've changed' the masked figure said calmly, standing beside him now. 'The old you would have been begging for mercy.'
Cam's rage only increased then as a memory of Brioke, a man he had almost forgotten, flashed in his mind suddenly. The old pain suddenly vivid, though he did not fear the memories as he once did.
'You will never get anything out of me by force! You hear me?! I would rather die first. I would rather kill first!'
He bowed his head then, summoning his magic to him.
The plates that bound him in place began to vibrate suddenly, glowing red hot as Cam's skin began to glow once more, hair turning white and lifting.
One of the plates snapped, and then another.
The men started, stepping back in horror as one by one, Cam freed each of his binds.
The light that consumed his body began to fade then, though his eyes were bloodshot red with anger.
The man that had stood before him died suddenly, his body nothing but blood and gore as his body was ripped apart, dead in less than a second.
The other man that had flipped the switch stumbled back then, Cam could see clearly the fear in him, the horror, the same fear and horror he had felt himself, all those years ago.
'So pathetic' Cam hissed, seeing the man before him, the man that reminding him suddenly of the self he used to be. 'So disgusting…'
The man stepped back again several times, as Cam backed him against the wall.
The back of the man's head was pressed again the wall behind, unable to lean back any further.
Cam was so close to the man now, their noses almost touching as he stared the man down, standing tall with eyes sharp and unblinking.
The man stared back in terror, unable to do anything to save himself.
He was killed, blood thrown everywhere, almost like an explosion, like water from a balloon bursting. Like Cam had done before.
Cam raised his hands, wiping his eyes clean.
He blinked the blood away, eyes tearing up suddenly in irritation.
'That's the spirit' the masked figure gleamed behind his mask. 'Don't be the victim. Be the one who is strong.'
Cam turned silently, walking past the masked figure ignoring him.
He walked slowly as he headed to the door, reaching out to take it, opening it slowly himself rather than using the magic.
Cam covered in red, his front damp with fresh blood, but he barely even seemed to notice.
He marched down the narrow empty corridors, moving with purpose, his thoughts only of escape.
He paused then, lights in the ceiling beginning to flash. The red circling lights reflected in his eyes.

Cam turned his head to the side, destroying a section of wall effortlessly.
He stepped through the hall, entering a room filled with people. They immediately ran away from him in a blind panic, screaming and falling over each other. Cam for an instant wondered why.
'She is here' the masked figure spoke behind Cam, though Cam did not turn. 'She is on her way to meet you. News of what you have done has already begun to spread.'
Cam ignored the figure, instead moving forwards again towards another hallway. He marched on for a few moments in silence, heading anywhere, in any random direction, as he sought a way out.
He stepped out into an open place for the second time, and here he found people waiting for him.
He barely registered what had happened, caught in some kind of trance. He held his metallic arm up to shield himself, a moment that was involuntary, he was hardly aware of doing it. Another thing he was not aware of was his magic, it seemed to be acting on his instinct rather than his thoughts, the simple act of defence, a thing so primal, a thing deeply ingrained in every living creature.
The wind around him picked up, in the space of a single second, it was like there was a hurricane in the room. People were thrown about, and the bullets fired in his direction, had been thrown back.
There were men in great machines, a device with wide arms and legs with the body that controlled it protected in the middle.
Cam had never seen these strange things before, but he brushed them away as if they were nothing, leaving behind raging fires, the men inside the protective shells in the middle of these metallic things, screaming in pain as they burned alive.
But Cam barely heard these sounds. The sounds of the dying.
He didn't care.
Instead he walked on, his rage growing inside him yet again at the thought of the men that had tried to stop him, and he was more determined than ever to reach home. He wanted to return to his team, the people that cared for him. His family.
The building around him began to shudder then, the very walls of the corridor themselves began to tremble as if in an earthquake. And as Cam felt his magic growing evermore inside him, by the presence of his magic, he felt each brick around him being torn apart from the next.
He intended to destroy the entire building around them, to kill anyone in his path regardless. More than anything, he wanted to go home.
But something stopped him in his tracks, as a figure stepped out from around the corner before him, Cam's magic instantly dissipated.
It was only himself that stopped his own magic, as fear instantly punctured his heart, as painful as if it had been a solid weapon.
Despite Cam's initial rage and demeanour, what he saw now made him quake in his boots, and he involuntarily collapsed to his knees, hunching forwards, with hands raised submissively.
'Please just kill me' Cam begged. 'Not the pain again…. please no more!'
Standing before him, Beloved smiled.

She approached him, reached out to him, touching his cheek tenderly, caressing him.
Cam began to sob uncontrollably, his old fears coming back to him tenfold, his body in physical pain at the memory of the attack, their last meeting. His chest constricted tightly, and with every heartbeat he felt a shooting pain in his body.
'I'm not going to hurt you' she whispered to him, as he stared up at her unblinking. 'I want us to be friends.'
'Trick…' Cam managed to gasp. 'You're lying…you want to hurt me.'
'No' Beloved smiled kindly, kneeling before him. 'I want you to help me.'
She took his head in both her hands, grasping him with a tenderness he did not think capable of such a monster. She reached forwards, closing her eyes as she kissed him on the forehead. Cam flinched as she did this, shoulders hunched and eyes closed, expecting to feel pain, and feeling surprise when he didn't.
'I can't imagine what you must think of me' Beloved said to him. 'But things will be different now. You have a new home. You are part of this organisation now.'
Cam raised his head again, eyes wide as tears continued to run down his cheeks. He stared back at the Category A, who smiled sweetly back at him.
She looked in every sense like a normal girl, she looked completely harmless, pretty, cute even.
'I want us to be friends' Beloved said to him, speaking with sincerity as she held him still. 'Do you think…. that maybe we could?'

Cam was taken away, he could remember very little of what happened after his meeting with Beloved. His body had just frozen up, he was no longer in control of himself.
Men had appeared around him, grabbing both his arms as Cam knelt. He felt a sharp jab in his neck then, realising moments later that it was a needle, as his body became a ragdoll.
He was unable to move, though still fully aware of everything around him.
He heard sounds, movements and shouting, footsteps all around him, but everything sounded distant and muffled, almost as if he were underwater.
Cam was vaguely aware of being lifted and carried away on a stretcher. What happened after that was a mystery to him, something lost to his memory, he thought afterwards that perhaps he had lost consciousness for a short time. The next he knew he was strapped to a table, arms bound to his side and legs bound together by the same metal plates as before, but this time he lay on his back.
There was a metal sheet over his eyes so that he could not see.
He let out a whimper, feeling afraid as he realised he was restrained again, before his eyes there was nothing but blackness. He was afraid that he could not see, afraid for what was about to happen.
'Please just help me' he whispered, speaking to no one in particular. 'When will the suffering end? Why does this keep happening to me?'
He gritted his teeth together, a tear running from the corner of his eyes as he continued to sob.
'I understand your name is Cameron' spoke a voice, and Cam tensed suddenly, falling silent.
'It's ok' the young female voice spoke. 'We are alone in this room. After what you did the others do not trust you, and I don't blame them. You killed people, quite a few in fact.'

Cam did not respond, he simply lay there silent and still, breathing slow and steady breaths through his mouth, his chest rising and falling gradually.
'The others are too afraid of you to be here in this room with us' Beloved continued, speaking in a calming tone as she sat on the edge of the metal table, leaning over him. 'They are scared you will kill them' Beloved said. 'They refuse to be in your presence. You did make quite a mess out there. In fact, I'm almost jealous.'
Cam's breath came in shudders then, and more tears ran from his eyes.
'I want my family' he breathed, tears continuing to fall. 'I want my team…. they will be looking for me now…I want to go back to them.'
'You cannot go back to them' Beloved told him calmly.
Cam gritted his teeth, beginning to sob now.
'Please don't cry' Beloved said to him. 'I understand you are afraid, but we will not hurt you. What happened before was a mistake, with myself and those men you killed. You are safe now. It's all been sorted…. you won't be hurt again…'
Beloved reached out to him, unlocking the bolts that held him in place upon the table.
She took the metal sheet away from his eyes, freeing his arms and legs also.
Cam sat up immediately crying out to her in panic. 'Why are you doing this?!'
She slapped him suddenly, her expression angry.
'Control yourself' she snapped as he stared towards the wall to the side, eyes still wide with surprise. 'I'm not going to hurt you. Stop being afraid. Control yourself.'
Cam turned back to her, his body still as he gripped the edges of the table.
'You're staying here from now on' Beloved spoke in a harsher tone. 'You got that?! I've been charged with your care. You stick with me from now on. Now get off that table and stand up.'
She backed away slowly then to give him space, and Cam after staring at her for a few moments, he swung his legs over the edge of the table and rose to a stand.
'There's been a misunderstanding' Beloved said. 'We want you here working for us at this facility because of your powers. You are an asset.'
'You've kidnapped me' Cam mumbled.
'Yes' Beloved answered shortly. 'Call it what it is, and that is how it is. We are alike you and I' she continued. 'We have powers unlike the humans we live with.'
'I'm not like you' Cam whispered, taking a step back and bowing his head.
'Oh Cam, don't give me that shit' Beloved snapped, glancing at the ground suddenly and kicking her feet in irritation. 'You think you're better than me because what and why? Some bullshit reason? Look at all the people you killed just now.'
'N-no' Cam fumbled. 'It wasn't like that…' he said beginning to panic, 'I-i-it was an a-a-accident.'
'You're a murder' Beloved spoke calmly, just like me.'
'N-n-n-n-n-no' Cam cried, body hunched over now and grasping his head. 'I-it was an accident.'
'Get a fucking grip on yourself' Beloved cried, grabbing him by the shoulders and snarling at him. 'Stop being a whiny little bitch and open your fucking eyes!'
'Don't touch me.'
Beloved ignored his order, instead doing the opposite.

She let go of him, grabbing him again by the wrist. She began to drag him.
Cam instantly tried to fight her.
She turned on him, lashing out at him with her hair that whipped around like tentacles, throwing him against the wall and attacking him for several moments to calm him down.
'Stop' she spoke firmly stepping towards him. 'Enough. Stop wasting my time. We both know I could kill you in a second so stop acting like such a coward. If I wanted to kill you I would have done so already.'
Cam recoiled under her grasp, great sections of her hair wound around his arms and legs as he curled up on the ground now, leaning back against the wall.
'You will come with me now and see what I have to show you' Beloved spoke.
She dragged him out of the room, which was an empty room, save for the table he had been bound to. Cam saw as he glanced back briefly that the room looked almost like a prison cell.
They were approached by men as Beloved continued to drag him down the corridor, a large section of her hair wrapped around his whole arm, his metallic arm on the left side.
'No, you can't let him go' one of the men fumbled. 'He's to be contained.'
'Move' Beloved snapped as she marched forwards, not pausing in her strides.
Both men stepped to the side falling instantly silent as she passed them by, continuing to drag Cam along.
She took him to the place he had been before, to the men he had killed.
They approached one of the corpses, barely recognisable as human. He was nothing but a lower half, complete from the waist down, from the waist up was nothing but a spine and now cold meat left clinging to a ribcage. There was no head, and there were no arms.
Beloved shoved Cam forwards, causing him to fall to his knees. She held him by the back of the neck forcefully as he stared at the dead body before him.
'Look' she howled. 'Look at what you have done!'
The stench and the blood and the gore was too much to bear, and as Cam felt the dampness on his knees as he knelt in the dried blood, he broke free from her then, turning away and retching.
'Don't you dare try to take the high road…*Cameron*' Beloved said to him as he wiped his mouth. 'Don't you dare try to be righteous. You are more like me than you would like to think. But I am not just evil as I'm sure you've been led to believe. Yes, I enjoy killing, I admit it freely. But things are not always so black and white. Open your *fucking* eyes.'
Cam raised his head, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.
He turned to face Beloved.
'We are to be partnered together' Beloved spoke with a sneer on her lips. 'You are a hostage don't get me wrong, but you are now no longer a prisoner. You are free to wander as long as you stick with me. You have a new organisation to serve now, and you cannot go home to your old one. Forget about that life. What's done is done.'

It was a few hours later, and Cam and Beloved were sitting side by side in a park. In a lot of ways this new facility, 'Delta' it was called, was a lot like the one Cam had left. There were shops and schools and training grounds and dormitories, but it was far more enclosed than the one Cam had come from. There were streets, open areas like courtyards with an ancient bell

tower in the centre that looked out of place, parks and pools, but it lacked the grandness of Cam's old organisation, despite the fact that it was bigger. It was made up of many smaller building, all connected together.
Cam and Beloved were in one of the many indoor parks within the middle of the organisation, the place was so big it almost felt like a city, but it was almost all indoors, almost.
Cam glanced up to the ceiling then, were there were sheets of lights that shone on the park below. If Cam didn't look up, he would have believed it was the natural sun. Something else that gave away the fact that they were indoors, was the utter stillness around them. There was no wind, and Cam felt a little out of place. He wanted so strong then to be outside.
They were sitting on a picnic bench, sitting on the table with their feet on the seats. The room/park around them was small, and at this time deserted. No one else was around.
Cam and Beloved maintained a distance between them on the picnic table, and Cam glanced towards Beloved tentatively. She was completely calm and happy now, playing with a fluffy cat on her lap, a very docile creature, large in size and lilac in colour.
'Who's a pretty baby?' she cooed. 'Are you a pretty baby? Are you my handsome little boy?'
'Um' Cam began tentatively. 'What…. I mean…what are we doing here?'
'You wanna hold him?' Beloved asked, holding the cat out in her arms towards Cam, the Ragdoll utterly relaxed in her hands.
'I'm not really…good with cats' Cam mumbled.
'His name is Caspian' Beloved continued, hugging him again and snuggling into him. 'He's my pet.'
'I want to go home.'
Beloved's expression turned serious then, and she glowered at Cam, causing him to shrink back away from her.
'You can't' she spoke in a serious voice. 'You can never see them again. You are part of *this* organisation now. You *will* do as you are told. I will make it so.'
Cam stared at her wide- eyed in fear, feeling a great tug on his heart.
He looked away, thinking about his team, grief in his belly began to swell.
'I've got a lot to teach you' Beloved continued, speaking again in a jovial voice. 'I am by far the strongest creature here. I am supposed to do as I am told yes, but people listen to me when I give them an order, because they are scared of me, as they are scared of you' she finished, turning to face Cam.
Cam began to sob into his hands then. Beloved's expression darkened.
She put Caspian down carefully on the ground, before turning back to Cam.
She grabbed him by the wrists, bearing over him and sitting on top of him as she pushed him back against the table.
'You don't…. *fucking*…. cry…. like *that*….' she snapped, her words punctuated by each blow from her fist. 'Get a hold of yourself' she snapped angrily, straddling his waist and leaning over him as she pinned him to the table. 'Your snivelling is making me sick.'
Beneath her Cam had stilled, holding his mouth now.
He turned his head to the side, spitting out several teeth.
Pain throbbed in his cheeks and around his eyes where she had hit him, it would swell and bruise in no time. But he dare not complain.

He pushed her off him then, half-heartedly. She allowed him to do this, and Cam straightened, rising off the picnic table and stumbling away, his head swimming.
'I miss my team…' he moaned. 'I want to see my team again.'
'You will never see them again' Beloved answered levelly.
Cam hunched his shoulders, body shuddering as he fought to control himself.
'They were like my family' he whispered.
'*Were'* Beloved emphasized. 'Past tense. See? You're getting used to it already.'
Cam began to cry then into his hands.
'This is fucking ridiculous' Beloved rolled her eyes. 'I had no idea you were such a whiny little bitch. I'm outta here, I'm not babysitting you any more…you're pathetic and make me sick…'
Beloved turned and walked away, but not before she bent down to pick up the cat, who had sat quietly by the picnic table.
Beloved cuddled the fluffy cat to her, cooing to it as she marched out of the park-room.
By the time Cam turned around, he saw that she was gone, and he was alone.

Cam blinked through teary eyes, glancing tentatively about him, feeling confused. Feeling lost.
He didn't know where he was, within the facility, or within the world. He did not know where 'Delta' was located, how far away it was from his own organisation.
He faced ahead again, hugging himself. For moments he just stood there, thinking.
What should I do…?
In the end he decided to walk. Anywhere.
He straightened up, walking forwards. He left the strange park-room behind him, entering a corridor.
As the one before it, it was narrow and empty, the walls looked like they were made of metal.
Cam swallowed the lump in his throat, making his way forwards very slowly. He glanced up at a camera pointed towards him as he made his way by, his attention lingering on it for a moment, before he turned away, continuing to walk.
As he went, another tear ran down his cheek as he thought of his old team. He raised his left arm then, staring at his mechanical limp.
It was true what they had told him, he now forgot most of the time that it was different now. Most of the time, he forgot that his arm was mechanical. Now he used it with ease, as if it had been his own all along.
Cam walked onwards, reaching the end of the corridor, and entering the room beyond.
He stepped through the door and saw that he was in a canteen.
People milled all around the room, they all turned to stare at Cam as he stepped into the room, silence fell around them.
Cam stared at he took another step forward, slowing to a stop and glancing in all directions.
The whispers began very quickly, and people began to back away from him.
'It's him. It's him. That's who killed my friend.'
They muttered as Cam stood there lost and confused. He felt a stab in his heart as he realised then that they were afraid of him.
He heard then people mutter words.

‘*Demon. Monster.’*
Cam gritted his teeth, forcing himself to remain in control.
He bowed his head then, marching forwards.
He wandered the facility at random for many minutes, eventually finding a map upon the wall, and following the correct path.
He came to a single small door, opening it and stepping out, feeling the fresh and free breeze from outside.
He stood in the doorway, his black hair blown back as he blinked several times. His hand dropped from the door handle, and he took a few steps forward, moving slowly into the grass.
The lands were vast, the grass green and bright. Cam blinked, tilting his head back. Everything seemed so peaceful before him, and as Cam looked, he saw in the distance a small group of deer.
‘It’s not too bad here is it?’
Cam turned towards the voice, seeing Beloved standing on the roof of the building above the door.
Beloved crouched, jumping off the roof and landing lightly onto the floor.
She straightened then, flattening her clothes, her knee length skirt swaying as she moved forwards. She was always dressed in black and very dark colours.
‘It’s not so bad here’ she told him. ‘I know what it’s like to be treated like a monster.’
‘I don’t belong here’ Cam breathed.
‘Neither do it’ Beloved replied. ‘But this is still my home…of a sort.’
Beloved moved to stand beside him, staring out towards the open and green lands. Cam turned, facing the fields before them.
Together they stood side by side, staring out at the world.
‘I too was taken from my family’ Beloved spoke sombrely as Cam stood silently there. ‘I know what it’s like. But I didn’t let myself crumble because of it. I used my pain to make myself stronger, and I never gave up…I never pitied myself. Not once.’
Cam turned very slowly towards her, staring at her with a strange expression.
Beloved in turn looked towards him.
‘I can teach you how to be strong like me’ Beloved whispered to him, speaking tenderly. ‘I could make you more like me.’
Cam blinked, turning away from her.
Beloved looked away too.
Together they stood, looking out onto the world.

Cam was given a room to stay, a room alone, one that was fairly large.
As he sat on the bed he glanced towards the single door, hearing the automatic lock sound.
He knew that even if he were to try to open the door, he could not get out. It was locked from the outside, there were cameras all over the facility and within his room also. He assumed also, that the room he stayed was reinforced against magic, maybe even strong enough against his. He doubted he could leave this room, even if he had the will to try.
The room was white, the bed he sat on very square and large. There were no windows here, and there was nothing within the room besides the bed itself. The floor was turquoise and

made of great reflective tiles, and there was just one other door within the room that led to a tiny bathroom.
It was utterly silent within the room, and as Cam leant forwards on his knees with his hands together, he began to feel a little afraid.
It was too silent in the room, too empty, too foreign. Cam swallowed the lump in his throat, feeling a long and deep ache in his heart at the thought of his team.
It almost felt like they had died, being taken away from him as abruptly as they had. Cam wondered what they were doing now at this very moment, and if they were looking for him.
But he knew there was no way they would find him, not here of all places.
Cam held his hands together, eyes shining.
But he blinked repeatedly several times, fighting to keep the tears back.
I don't want to be weak he thought. *I want to be strong.*
He hung his head, as Beloved's words slowly sunk into him. He began to believe what she had said.
He would never see his old team again. They were far from him now.
He raised his head, glancing about him at the room.
'I want my books…'

The next morning, Beloved came for him.
'Morning!' she cried happily, opening the door without knocking.
Cam was already awake, having hardly slept. He sat on the edge of the bed now, facing the door, simply waiting for it to open.
'How do you feel?' Beloved asked Cam, placing a box down on the floor beside the door.
Cam blinked slowly, he didn't answer.
'This is for you' Beloved told him, indicating the box. 'Clothes' she told him simply. 'Socks and shirts and so on. Are you hungry?'
Cam bowed his head, staring down at his lap.
'The canteen is open all hours. But what they serve depends on the time of day.' She half-turned from him, lingering in the doorway. 'Are you coming?'
Cam rose then, his movements mechanical. He walked over towards her, following as she led the way.
Cam glanced back briefly, to see the door, operated by mechanics, close behind him, sliding shut. He faced ahead again, walking in silence for a moment before glancing to the side towards Beloved.
She returned his gaze, grinning happily and shrugging her shoulders as she went, holding her hands together before her.
'This place will start to feel less weird the longer you stay here' she said to him. 'It did for me.'
'Why am I here?' Cam asked her, 'what is going to happen to me?'
'You are under my care' Beloved said to him, facing ahead again as they went. 'And when you are not under my care, you are to be monitored.' As they continued their way down the corridor, Cam glanced up then, seeing yet another camera mounted on the wall.
'The surveillance here is….' He trailed off, never finishing his sentence.

‘Our organisation is not like the one you’ve come from’ Beloved explained. ‘We are different.’
That is all that she would say for now.
Cam glanced towards her again, before looking ahead.
The two walked in silence from that point, until they reached the canteen, several minutes later. The facility was large and walking anywhere could take a very long time.
The corridors they had traversed were silent and deserted, but when they reached the canteen, Cam saw that it was incredibly busy. People of all sorts were here, all ages, mostly men however. They were all dressed very differently, and many of the tables were filled with people sitting together and eating. People queued for food and were served by older men and women in an open kitchen. Cam watched as people carried their food on trays to tables, bringing their empty trays back to an empty counter where they put their dirty plates and cutlery, scraping uneaten food and leftover drinks into two separate bins.
‘You stay here ok?’ Beloved said to Cam, as he took a seat at an empty table in the corner of the hall. ‘I’ll go get us something to eat. Anything you don’t like to eat?’
‘Anything is fine’ Cam mumbled.
Beloved nodded, turning away then and heading towards the queue. Cam watched her as she went, straightening slightly in surprise at what he saw.
People shied away from her, doing so quickly as she headed straight to the front of the queue. She took two trays, and the people behind the counter in the kitchen served her two portions very quickly, doing so silently.
As Cam watched, he saw that the others around the hall were staring at Beloved, and he realised.
‘They’re afraid of you too’ Cam said to her, as she sat down opposite him.
Beloved gave Cam a very strange look, sliding Cam’s tray across the table towards him.
Upon the tray was a full cooked breakfast and a glass of orange juice.
‘Yes’ Beloved replied to Cam. ‘They are afraid of me. You mean you only just noticed?’
Cam bowed his head, averting his attention then and feeling very uncomfortable.
‘What is my purpose here?’ he asked, speaking to his food.
Beloved considered him, leaning forwards with her elbows on the table.
‘I belong to this organisation’ Beloved said to him, ‘but I don’t belong in the same way as any other man or woman here belongs. I am a monster, I am…. less a part of this organisation. It’s more like they own me. Like I am property.’
‘Own?’ Cam echoed tentatively.
‘Like an object’ Beloved spoke quietly. ‘Look at this.’
Cam turned his head sharply away in shock as Beloved lifted her shirt to him, revealing her naked chest.
‘Look’ Beloved ordered Cam, her tone short and sharp. ‘Look at me.’
Cam turned back to her reluctantly, seeing her naked breasts.
He blinked, brow furrowed as he stared, leaning forwards slightly.
‘What is that?’ he breathed.
Beloved ran a finger down the vertical scar briefly, before lowering her shirt again.
‘I received an operation many years ago’ Beloved explained. ‘There is…. a bomb inside me.’
Cam felt a stab in his heart then, eyes widening in shock.

‘It was the only way they can control me’ Beloved explained. ‘I can kill without a thought, without regret. I could kill…. everyone…….in this entire facility…with ease…without a worry or a care. I am not human’ she continued. ‘I am not here by choice. I am a prisoner just like you. The only reason you do not have a bomb placed inside you as I have, is because you are far weaker than I. I am controlled by this organisation, everything I do is monitored. There is a device in me besides the bomb, that monitors everything I say, tracks my every movement, and records my heartbeat and body temperature and so much more.’ She looked up at Cam again. ‘They survey me, and I survey you. You are completely under my control, as I am completely under their control.’
Cam listened in shock at her words.
‘So….’ Cam uttered. ‘What do you do here? I mean…. personally.’
Beloved sighed, and a forlorn expression crossed her face then, something Cam had not yet seen before.
‘I am given free reign’ Beloved said, ‘but I am monitored every moment of everyday, and if I ever do anything wrong…like deliberately kill one of our own, then I will be severely punished. And if I go too far I will be killed outright.’
Beloved reached out to Cam then, taking Cam’s mechanical arm in her hand.
‘I cannot feel you’ she breathed. ‘This arm of mine’ she said drawing back, ‘is a false one, much like the one you have now. As well as the bomb inside my chest, the one that would kill me, I also have a bomb in each of my arms and legs. One of them, the one in this arm’ she said staring down at it, ‘was detonated many years ago when I….’ her eyes narrowed then, ‘when I went rogue.’
She straightened in her seat then, placing her hands before her.
‘This new false arm looks real, covered by a skin, but it is mechanical inside, just like yours.’
She blinked slowly at him then. ‘I am absolutely under the control of this organisation.’
‘So, um….’ Cam said, ‘what….do you do here…?’ he asked her. ‘I mean…from day to day. Do you train?’
‘There is no need for me to train’ Beloved replied. ‘I am at my pique. I cannot become stronger. No…’ she said turning away, ‘I spend my days just…. doing what I want…’

Later that day they left the facility together, heading out towards the open woodland nearby.
Cam found this strange, and although he knew that Beloved was constantly under surveillance, he found it odd that they were both allowed to simply wander free. Considering what they were both capable of.
Beloved led the way, skipping ahead of him playfully with her arms out as she went.
They came to a steep hill, moving carefully down it and coming to a wide and slow running river. Around them the trees grew sparse.
Beloved bent down to pick up a stone from the edge of the river, a wide and flat stone. She used it to skim across the water, the flat stone bouncing upon the water several times before sinking below the surface.
Cam approached her from behind, stopping a short distance away.
‘Do you like skimming stones?’ she asked Cam then, turning back to him.
‘I’ve never really done it’ Cam replied.
‘Try it’ Beloved said.

Cam raised an eyebrow uncertainly, stepping closer to her.
He took a rock that she handed to him, turning to face the water.
'Just throw it' she told him.
Cam glanced down at the flat rock in his hand, before looking up again at the water.
He threw the rock, which landed straight in the water.
'No, you're doing it wrong' Beloved said, 'throw it across the surface of the water, not *in* the water.'
Cam glanced up at her.
'Like this' Beloved indicated, motioning the action.
Cam faced the water again, copying her movements and throwing the second rock she handed him. It bounced twice upon the surface of the water before sinking.
'See?' Beloved grinned widely. 'It's fun isn't it?'
Cam looked away again.
'Try again' Beloved said, reaching down to get another rock. 'Try to get more bounces this time. We could compete each other. The most bounces I've had is eight.'
Cam took the rock from her, turning and throwing it across the surface of the water again, only succeeding in one more bounce before the rock sunk.
'Great' Beloved clapped excitedly, 'now it's my turn.'
They continued like this for quite some time, before Beloved wanted a rest.
'I'm just going to stay here for a minute' she told Cam, leaning back against a tree, resting on the forest floor. 'I'm a little tired.'
Cam watched her for several minutes, glancing away occasionally before looking back at her. Beloved had become completely still, leaning back with her head bowed, she appeared to be fast asleep.
After about ten minutes, Cam sat down upon the ground, a distance away from Beloved across from the clearing.
Cam blinked slowly, raising his head one last time, before closing his eyes. He did not fall asleep though, but listened intently to the sounds of the forest around them, forgetting for a moment where they were, until he heard the sound of a helicopter returning to the facility sometime later.
Cam saw the thing in the sky behind the branches of the trees overhead, the blades of the helicopter chopping through the air.
Cam lowered his head again, looking forwards and across the clearing towards Beloved, who began to stir now.
She opened her eyes, rising then and walking slowly back towards the edge of the water.
For the longest time she stood there, simply looking away.
'I did not realise you were…' Cam began, speaking to her, but he trailed off before finishing his words.
'I know' Beloved replied. 'I am more human than you could have imagined. In the field I am savage, but I can know peace too.'
'So, what do you do?' Cam asked her. 'From day to day if you do not train.'
'When I am not on a mission completing a task' Beloved replied. 'This is what I do. I play with my cat, I wander the facility, I walk outside, I read a book.'
'You have books?'

‘Of course we have books’ Beloved laughed, turning back to him. ‘Do you like to read?’ Beloved asked him.
‘It’s…. yes’ Cam replied eagerly. ‘I enjoy reading very much.’
‘I’ll show you some of our books then’ Beloved said turning away from him. ‘But maybe another time.’
‘You mentioned about this organisation doing these things to you’ Cam began, hugging his knees to his chest as Beloved turned back to Cam. ‘Why did they do that to you, and where did you come from?’
Beloved’s eyes became distant then as she stared to the dirt at her feet.
‘For a long time, I thought they were just being cruel to me’ Beloved said, ‘…in the beginning.’
She blinked slowly.
‘They tortured me in the most horrible way for the longest time, and it was that pent-up emotion, the pain…that caused my magic to manifest itself inside my body…before finally being released to its fullest.’ She raised her head then, looking away towards the clouds that drifted lazily above. ‘I don’t know if you could ever understand such a thing’ she said to Cam in a mumble.
‘I do’ Cam spoke up, and Beloved glanced over at him. ‘I have…’ Cam continued in a whisper, ‘…experienced….’
He never finished his sentence.
‘It wasn’t the organisation I serve now that did that to me’ Beloved told him, ‘but another one, one that…. does not exist anymore.’ She smiled then. ‘It’s a long story, but I was…detained’ she said, ‘by ‘Delta’ after a time…. I hardly remember anything of that night, but I remember somethings.’
‘Is that what they want to do to me?’ Cam asked her tentatively. ‘Do they want to hurt me again?’
Beloved straightened then, facing him head on.
‘I will protect you by teaching you how to protect yourself.’
She approached him with a smile upon her face.
‘I’m glad to see you’re no longer afraid of me’ she said to him.
‘Ha’ Cam breathed. ‘Well yes I mean…if you wanted to kill me….’ he smiled awkwardly at her. ‘Death isn’t always something we can protect ourselves against or run from.’
‘That is certainly true. Life is hard isn’t it?’ Beloved said to him. ‘Come on. Let’s go back home.’
Together they headed out of the woods, making their way across the fields.
Side by side they walked leisurely back towards the base, the organisation known as ‘Delta’, Cam feeling a strange sort of peace as he went. He began to feel comfortable beside Beloved, no longer fearing her. He began to feel serenity. Though mixed with it, was sadness.

Interlude start

Beloved screamed, unable to move an inch, she was strapped very tightly to the metal table, completely naked, the men in white lab coats standing around her.
Her white hair spilled over the table, as one of the men continued to drill into her skull.
Beloved hands were gnarled as she struggled against the bonds, but there was nothing she could do to protect herself.
There was blood upon the floor and on the table. Beloved gritted her teeth, tears streaming down her cheek.
'Please no more' she sobbed, 'please just kill me…I can't take it it's too much!'
But they did not listen.
Beloved gasped then, feeling the sensation of fire suddenly within her chest.
Her white hair turned black, the colour streaking down to the ends.
She let out a calming sigh then, the binds that held her to the table breaking away.
She sat up, facing the men around him.
She smiled suddenly, before slaughtering everyone in the room.

Interlude end

'He's so cute' Beloved cooed, fussing over the cat on her lap. 'See how he goes limp like that' Beloved said, lifting him in her hands. 'Do you want to pet him?' she asked Cam.
'I'm not really um…'
'Go on' Beloved prompted. 'Touch him, he's so soft.'
Cam stared at the cat for a few moments, before reaching out to touch its fur.
'I don't feel anything' he spoke without thinking, before realising he was caressing the cat with his left hand, his metallic hand.
He drew back then, holding his hands together.
'Where did you come from?' Cam asked suddenly out of the blue. 'There are very few of your kind' he continued, 'and…um…. well they call you a monster.'
'I know what I am' Beloved replied sullenly. 'I suppose I deserve the name, I am a monster in every sense of the word. But then again you are too.'
Cam glanced over at her, his eyes wide.
'I have memories of a life as a normal girl' Beloved spoke in a mumble, 'back when I was very young, just a toddler. My mother…I'm sure that's who she was, it was a woman that cared for me…. she had corn-coloured hair' she said, trailing off. 'But' she spoke again after a time with a smile, 'I don't know if any of those things ever happened, or if they were false memories planted within me, something to keep me tied to this world.'
'Keep you to this world?' Cam echoed.
'There are many that believe monsters like me come from another world' Beloved told him with a smile.

Cam watched her closely for a few moments, before turning away, leaning forwards on his elbows with his hands together.
He said nothing.
‘The truth is’ Beloved began, ‘you are not that much weaker than me. We are about the same.’
‘We are?’ Cam said in surprise.
‘Mh-hm’ she nodded. ‘The reason you could not defeat me before, is because you were using the wrong spell.’
‘Wrong spell?’
‘Yes. Light is my weakness. This shows how much I care for you and trust you by telling you this, but you can defeat me fairly easily with light.’
Cam felt a strange sensation inside him then.
‘You care for me?’
Beloved smiled at him but did not acknowledge the question.
‘You on the other hand’ she continued ‘have no weakness that I can exploit. So. Now that you know my weakness are you going to kill me?’
‘No, because the truth is’ he said turning to her with a smile, ‘that I care for you too…kind of…. I mean I think I do, despite what you did to me.’
‘Well I’m glad you don’t hold a grudge’ she beamed, reaching out to take his hand, feeling the metallic fingers between her own. ‘It’s good to have a friend at last in this world.’

Many months passed, and Cam and Beloved had become a team. They set out on missions together, and always alone. For Cam it was a very different experience to the organisation he had come from, there he had been part of a team of several. Here he always worked with Beloved and only her. After a time, the organisation ‘Delta’ began to trust him to go out on his own on jobs, believing he would not try to run away back to his old organisation, and Cam never did. Thought he thought about them sometimes and missed them so much it physically hurt him, he never spoke about it to anyone. The organisation he had come from had been very welcoming to him, but here in ‘Delta’ he was an outcast alongside Beloved, but after a time he didn’t seem to mind, because they had each other.
At times he would think about his other organisation, but he didn’t know where they were. He didn’t know how he could find them, even if he could escape, ‘Delta’ would find him before he could get very far anyway. And he feared what they would do to him. He didn’t want to destroy what was now between himself and Beloved.
Their missions were very different also, they would travel to dark places, places Cam did not even know existed. On one of their missions they visited a mighty tower in the dead of night, it had sprouted out of nothing from the ground beneath it, forming a mighty structure in the centre of the town that had long since been abandoned. It was an eerie place to be, and as they approached the tower, Beloved and Cam both felt a dark presence about the place, a suffocating feeling. It only grew strong as they drew closer to the tower. Inside they found horrid things, vile creatures of the kind Cam had never seen before, but they were not monsters in the same was that Beloved was, they were not the same kind of monsters Cam

had fought and killed so often when going on missions with the other organisation. These were different, he knew this, though he did not know how he knew this. But Beloved still treated these creatures differently to Cam, though she killed them as he did, though she did not feel the same revulsion towards them as he did, and seemed almost sad to end their lives, if they could even have been called living. Cam did not know if they were conscious in anyway.
Dark shadows they were, with naked skulls and unseen bodies. They shrieked in the dark and attacked with oversized weapons they wielded with ease, strange weapons, like scissors and giant pins and forks.
Cam and Beloved eradicated all they found in their path, Beloved kneeling before one of those that had fallen and caressing the skull of it tenderly, before destroying it.
They found strange things in the tower, and Cam and Beloved both felt strong concentrations of magic around them.
It was a dark and sinister place, and they found dark passages leading to rooms that could not be truly described in words, the feel of the place once entering, could not be truly conveyed.
There were carvings in the floor, and fresh blood running along these indentations, all leading to a centre platform, where the air was heavy.
Many of their missions together were like this, where they ventured to places like these, where there were portals in the air, doorways to other worlds, but they never crossed through these, as 'Delta' forbade it, though Beloved desired it greatly.
'Something is very wrong' Beloved said to Cam not for the first time, 'something truly evil is coming.'
'Are we getting closer to our goal?' Cam asked Beloved.
'Yes' she mumbled. 'We have nearly found it. We must stop it before it reaches this world.'

It was many more weeks later when Cam and Beloved went on another mission. Their missions, due to their unusual nature, were few and far between, they spent more of their days at the base 'Delta' simply drifting around, almost always in each other's company.
On this day, they were given another mission in the very late hours, and it was dark.
Cam sat on the edge of the building upon its roof, letting his legs dangle over the drop below him, as he stared down at the streets so far away.
'Have you ever had thoughts of killing yourself?' Beloved asked him, and Cam turned.
She was standing behind him a short distance away.
'Yes' Cam replied. 'I have…thought of jumping once' he said looking back to the drop at his feet. 'I nearly did it. I thought these thoughts often throughout my life……...I don't know what saved me in the end, I really don't know how I survived my life for this long. I guess…the memories of the few I truly love and care for in my life are….'
They often had these sorts of talks between them, and Beloved often asked him strange questions, Cam got used to them after a while.
'Well I've never really cared for anyone' Beloved said, hugging herself and turning away. 'I don't really remember anyone anyway.'
Cam began to laugh quietly to himself then.
'What's so funny?' Beloved asked turning back to him.

‘I just had the strangest thought’ Cam said glancing around to face her. ‘I wondered about you being married’ he said. ‘I wonder what you would be like as a wife.’
‘Why, are you interested?’ she teased, putting her hands on her hips then.
‘No, I’m not interested’ Cam said turning away.
‘I would make a terrible wife’ Beloved said. ‘Can you imagine me staying at home and baking cakes?’
‘Well….’ Cam mumbled, ‘actually maybe I can. In my life I found myself doing things I never imagined I would be doing.’
‘Like what?’
‘Farming.’
Beloved watched him closely.
‘In my own world, I was a prince, a king and then…. I became a gypsy…then a farmer……. after a time, I ended up here.’
He had told Beloved many things about his past, but nothing in any sort of detail.
‘Isn’t that odd?’
‘Yeah it is’ Beloved mumbled. ‘I guess you never really know what’s going to happen in life…where you will be tomorrow…where anyone of us could be tomorrow.’
‘I’m going to return home’ Cam spoke in confident voice, ‘…someday…’
‘I’m probably going to be killed.’
Cam watched her with a silent stare.
‘Creatures like me….’ Beloved spoke in a calming voice, ‘…we don’t get happy endings…’
Cam turned away from her, staring at the dark sky before him. It was ever so silent around them, nothing moved.
‘Come on’ Beloved uttered. ‘It is time. The creature should be active now.’
Cam rose to his feet, striding after Beloved as they headed into the dark building, making their way forwards for a long time, before entering a large facility.
Cam slowed to a stop just as he entered the room, gazing about him curiously. Beloved continued before him, never missing a stride. She twirled once happily, the black skirt she wore swaying around her. She always dressed in black, always.
‘The air feels heavy’ Cam uttered.
‘Yeah it does’ Beloved replied, though she spoke calmly and with confidence.
‘It’s unnaturally quiet in here’ Cam realised speaking out loud, ‘I can feel my own heartbeat…it feels wrong.’
Beloved who had been kneeling on the ground, examining some strange marking on the floor straightened slowly then, facing a great slab that stood vertical in the room near the centre. The edges were jagged, and upon its front was carved strange writing that was not of this world.
A wild gleam slowly descended upon Beloved, her eyes reflecting the shining blue light that emanated from the slab in the centre of the room, and from it, came a creature.
First its skeletal hand protruded from the portal in the rock, and slowly, the rest of its body leant forwards out of the light.
It moved in absolute silence, its head a massive skull of raw bone, its shape elongate, its teeth cruel.

Beloved hunched her shoulders, giggling into her hands, her voice echoing unnaturally loudly in the room as she did.
The creature moved towards her, gliding gently, the trailing wisps of its body moving slowly after it as if it moved through water.
'I'll get this' Beloved offered, reaching a hand out to indicated for Cam to stay behind as she stepped closer to the thing.
Cam backed calmly away, allowing Beloved to approach the thing, which seemed almost peaceful, but Cam knew it was anything but. He didn't know how he knew this, but there was a certain wrongness in the air.
Everything was completely silent in the room, as only Beloved and the creature moved.
The creature was the first to attack, striking out at Beloved in a move that seemed impossibly fast, Cam had missed the strike in but a single blink. Beloved however was not phased, having dodged the attack with ease.
'Very good' she smiled at the creature, her voice echoing loudly in the room, the echo was a thing that the creature itself created. 'That was fun. You are strong.'
She lashed out suddenly towards the creature, her hair whipping as fast as the creature had moved before, but this time a blow was struck. The creature shrunk back suddenly, as if in pain, but it uttered not a sound.
Cam as he watched felt frightened at the hideousness of the beast, its unnatural calmness.
Beloved giggled again as they continued to fight, moving almost like in a ballet, Beloved's echoes sounding all around them.
Eventually when she had had enough of toying with the creature, Beloved moved sharply towards it, her chest pressed against the creatures that towered over her, her head tilted far back as she gazed into its skull-face, her eyes wide with excitement.
She took a slow and deep breath inwards, the body of the creature before her shuddering as if it were in some sort of pain or discomfort. It suddenly seemed to relax, becoming calm, before its body glowed brighter for an instant, facing away moments later as its light was absorbed into Beloved's body.
Beloved stumbled forwards, head bowed and holding herself for a moment, before letting out a sigh, her breath fogging before her.
She straightened then, lowering her hands and turning back to Cam with a smile. The creature was no more, and the whole process had been a very quiet ordeal.
'That one was very strong' Beloved said.
'I wasn't worried' Cam mumbled, unfolding his arms.
'Good' Beloved beamed happily at him.
'They are so cruel' Cam mentioned, 'I can feel their hate and loathing.'
'It's not their fault' Beloved mumbled. 'They are just scared and angry because they have been brought here against their will. All they want is to go back to where they came from, but they are not allowed to return. And they fight because it's all they know.'
Beloved approached him, standing close before him and staring up at him with a smile.
Cam's expression became tender then, as he smiled down at her in turn.
She looked past him then behind him, frowning ever so slightly.
'What's that?' she voiced.
Cam turned, staring into the darkness of the room.

For several moments nothing happened, and nothing appeared, and then, a figure stepped out from the darkness, one that Cam recognised.
'……...Cam?'
Cam stared in shock and disbelief.
'Magnet?!'
Cam heard sudden movement beside him, glancing around he saw that it was Beloved. She has used her ability to lift herself to a higher platform, her long hair like tentacles waving gently around her as she looked down upon the scene.
Magnet standing there seeing here snarled then, raising his weapon.
'No!' Cam ordered, stepping forwards and raising his hand to stop him. 'Don't hurt her.'
'What?' Magnet gasped.
Cam raised his head then, seeing behind Magnet stood the others. Elaina, Selye, Russel, Pink, and Sydney.
Sydney let out a cry of emotion, dropping his weapon and rushing up to Cam, wrapping his arms around.
'Cam! I can't believe you're here! Oh my god!' he sobbed into his chest.
'S-Sydney.'
Cam's words were cut off suddenly as Sydney kissed him passionately for a moment before breaking away.
'What on earth are you doing here?' Sydney gasped. 'We thought we had lost you forever, we tried to find you!'
Cam frowned, placing his hands upon Sydney's shoulders firmly and pushing him back.
'Sydney, I….'
'What happened to you Cam?' Selye spoke up, glancing tentatively up to where Beloved stood.
They were all on edge, afraid of Beloved. They were terrified.
'She…she won't hurt you' Cam told them.
'Cam what's going on?' Magnet spoke seriously. 'Why are you working with this creature, do you work for 'Delta' now?'
'You don't understand' Cam said to him. 'Something bad is happening. We are trying to stop it.'
'Cam what's going on?' Sydney asked him, his voice breaking. 'Why are you working alongside her? You remember what she did to you?'
'I….' Cam whispered, grasping his left fist into a ball, his metallic arm shifting. 'Things are different now' he whispered, backing away with tears in his eyes before whispering. 'I'm sorry…'
He lifted himself in the air by magic, soaring above their heads in a vertical line, ignoring the others as they called desperately after him.
It pained him to hear their voices like that.
Cam elevated himself to the next platform above, beside Beloved again.
She turned and ran alongside him as they hurried out of the room and onwards, into the next area.
'What are they doing here?' Cam gasped as they ran, furiously brushing the tears from his eyes. 'Why?'

‘Pure luck’ Beloved replied. ‘There are a lot of monsters here. I’m sure they came to eradicate them.’
As they ran down the dark corridor, neither of them noticed a figure clad all in black, wearing a plague-mask to hide its face. The figure sat on another elevated platform high above them, sitting quietly as it watched them go by.
‘I’m glad you didn’t hesitate’ Beloved gleamed back at him as they slowed to a stop after a time. ‘I’m glad you understand how important what we are doing really is.’
She grasped him by the front of the shirt then, standing on her tip toes to reach him as she kissed him on the lips.
‘Thank you’ she whispered, smiling up at him, before releasing him and turning again. ‘Come on’ she said moving again, ‘let’s go.’
Cam stared after her for a moment in surprise, before making his way after her.
‘Hold on’ Beloved gasped, grasping her head then with eyes wide. ‘I sense something.’
They reached in a place where the corridor they ran down met several overs, forming a cross shape.
Beloved looked about her, first one way, then the other.
‘Oh my god it’s here’ she breathed.
‘It is?’ Cam whispered, feeling nervous. ‘Oh….’
Beloved whipped around suddenly, facing down one of the corridors.
She hesitated for only a moment before tearing forwards. Cam followed hesitantly after her.
They came to another room, which was pitch black, only a pale light barely visible shining before them.
Beloved stopped then, a strange expression crossing her face, a look of uncertainty.
She stepped closer towards the light.
Cam noticed a flash beside him, something so brief that he barely even noticed it.
His eyes shone in the dark as he moved to the side towards the thing that he saw, though he wasn’t sure what it was.
Behind him Beloved had drawn closer to the pale light in the centre of the room.
She turned to Cam suddenly.
‘Cam! Watch out!’
Cam spun around to face the voice. An instant later, the bomb went off.

Interlude start

‘Neon?’ Arvin called out in the dark room. ‘Neon are you there?’
There was a moment of silence, and then a shadow fell across the floor from beyond the doorway, moving across the floor as Neon suddenly entered the room, pausing on the threshold with his hand upon the frame.
‘Arvin’ he sighed. ‘There you are.’

He let his hand slide from the wood, stepping forwards towards Arvin who stood by the window looking out.
Neon approached him, standing by his side.
The two men stood side by side.
'Is everything alright?' Neon asked tentatively, glancing to Arvin.
Neon was just seventeen in age. Arvin was nearly thirty.
'I'm scared' Arvin mumbled.
'What?'
'I'm scared' Arvin repeated, his voice very low.
'Why are you scared?' Neon asked him.
'I'm scared for what's about to happen?'
'Why?' Neon mumbled uncertainly. 'What is about to happen?'
For a moment Arvin did not answer.
'You love me….' Arvin voiced, '…. don't you?'
'Yes' Neon spoke firmly. 'You know I love you. Why would you ask that?'
'You love me?' Arvin asked again.
'Yes, I love you' Neon answered, his expression confused and uncertain now.
'You wouldn't lie to me' Arvin whispered. 'Would you?'
'No Arvin.'
'You would never leave me, would you?'
'What's all this about?' Neon asked a little worried now. 'What's happened?'
'You wouldn't leave me' Arvin pressed, '…. would you?'
'No' Neon spoke firmly. 'I would never…'
'Good' Arvin said turning away for a moment, before looking back at him. 'Because I would never leave you, and I would never lie to you either.'
He punched him then, sending Neon sprawling across the floor.
Neon clapped his hand over his mouth, whipping his head back around towards Arvin in absolute horror.
'You're a liar' Arvin spoke dangerously, stepping towards him. 'I know what's happening.'
'W-what?' Neon gasped.
'You're going to leave me' Arvin hissed, swinging his foot across Neon's jaw, sending an arch of blood that splattered on the floor.
Neon coughed and spluttered, spitting out teeth and moaning in pain.
He was unable to speak as Arvin approached him again, kicking him again hard in the stomach, swinging his foot back and hitting him with the tip of his steel-toed boot, causing Neon to curl up into a ball, hugging himself. Arvin kicked him again and again, pausing only to take breath.
'No more!' Neon gasped, begging him to stop. *'.... please*!'
Arvin knelt then, grabbing him by the face.
'You were going to leave me' Arvin whispered, eyes wild as Neon stared back at him with terror, something he had never experienced around Arvin before. 'You're a *liar*…'
He grabbed Neon with both hands now, digging his nails into his face hard as Neon began to whimper, blood running from his nose and mouth.

‘I won’t let you leave me’ Arvin whispered, his grip relaxing, before letting him go. ‘No one else will have you…you are *mine*…’
He rose then, moving over towards the desk as Neon hunched his shoulders, beginning to sob.
‘I don’t want you to suffer’ Arvin whispered. ‘I will end this quickly.’
Neon glanced up again, feeling terror doubled many times over as he saw Arvin take a letter opener from the desk, it was razor sharp.
‘*SOMEBODY HELP ME!*’ he screamed, beginning to crawl away, but Arvin stopped him.
He rolled Neon over onto his back, straddling his waist and pinning him to the ground.
‘*No please please please…*’
‘No one will *ever* take you away from me’ Arvin said, his voice wavering. ‘You hear me? *No one…’*
He stabbed him in the chest, and again, a third time.
He dropped the weapon, which landed with a thud on the soft carpet, Arvin’s arms limp by his side now. Beneath him Neon was still, body still trembling, breath in shallow gasps as he began to choke on his own blood. He was still alive, but he did not struggle anymore, he knew he was dying.
‘Oh Neon…’
Arvin leant over him, kissing him on the lips.
‘Your blood tastes so good’ Arvin whispered.
Neon’s face contorted, his tears mixed with blood upon his face, he let out a gurgled cry and a whimper as Arvin caressed his cheek tenderly. And then he died.
Arvin watched the very moment his heart stop beating, he watched, as Neon’s consciousness suddenly left him, his eyes now seeing nothing.
He was dead.

<u>Interlude end</u>

‘You lost it!’ the man cried, standing over Beloved who cowered before him.
‘I…. I tried’ she fumbled. ‘I had to get Cam out of there.’
The man grabbed her by the shoulder then and slapped her with all his might. Beloved screamed in pain at the sting.
‘Look!’ the man howled, holding her by the back of the neck and pushing her forwards towards the window beside them. ‘Look at what you did to him!’
Beyond the glass, on the other side of the room, was Cam. He lay unconscious on the hospital bed, eyes closed and utterly still.
‘This is all your fault’ the man hissed into her ear before shoving her away. ‘Put her in solitary until I say to let her out’ he ordered the soldiers standing by the door.

Beloved sobbed and cried into her hands as she was led away. The man ignoring her, turned silently back towards the window, staring intently at Cam through the glass.

Cam woke gradually, blinking several times as he stared up at the ceiling. It took several seconds for his mind to come too. He recognised the lights above him as being similar to the ones in the hospital wing in the facility he had come from.
He slowly came to realise that he was in hospital again.
Cam raised his head, his body in terrible agony, he moved gingerly.
Cam looked to his left arm, seeing the metal arm there. Then looked to his right arm, vision clouding over in shock as he realised, instead of his own arm there, there was a metallic one, similar to the other one he had, but slightly different.
Cam laid his head back then, turning his head from side to side as his face screwed up in grief.
He tensed his body, arching his back and balling both his fists, his metallic hands grasping the sheets of the bed he lay on.
He cried out in grief, screaming in defiance as he raised both his hands to his head, clawing at his scalp in despair, his new metallic arm not moving properly.
Several figures ran to him then, surrounding his bed. They spoke to him, but Cam did not hear.

'I can't believe this is happening' Cam spoke huskily, eyes bloodshot red. 'How…why?'
He raised his new hand up, the metallic hand, like the other one when he had first been given it, failing to move properly. 'I can never touch Lucy again…I can never feel her warm skin...can never hold her again…. not like before…not like I should…I cannot *feel*…'
As he stared at his own new hand, silent tears rolled down his cheeks.
He turned away from the nurse that stood by his bed.
Cam lay down on the bed with his back to her.
'Leave me' he said. 'I want to be alone…'

He stayed here for a month, and this was when Beloved was able to visit him.
The door slid quietly open, and Cam turned towards it, seeing Beloved enter.
She walked slowly with her hands folded before her and head bowed.
She stopped before his bed, looking up at him.
'Hey.'
'Where have you been?' Cam whispered. 'Why didn't you come to see me?'
'I was in solitary confinement.'
Cam blinked at her silently, before turning away.
'I've lost my other arm' he whispered. 'I can't touch anything now' he said, closing his eyes, a single tear running down his cheek.

‘It’s not so bad’ she said to him, lifting his new arm and weaving her fingers through his metallic ones. ‘I think it looks kind of cool.’
His new arm was very different to the other metallic arm he had, this new one was smoother, the inner working of the arm hidden by a strange kind of material that looked almost like human skin but was clearly not natural. The new arm was a lot smoother.
‘How do you feel?’ Beloved asked him.
‘I…’ Cam began. ‘I can’t hear on my right side’ he said, ‘and I…. I can’t see clearly.’
Cam turned to her then, lifting one of his hands. He covered one of his eyes, then the other, before letting his hand fall back to the bed.
‘They say my sight on my right side won’t come back’ he told her.
He began to grit his teeth then, body contorted suddenly as he grimaced, a pain in his head gripping him then, before he began to relax.
‘I feel an ache in my head’ he said. ‘I… it feels like it did before when the worm was….’ He trailed off. ‘But it’s gone now, so why do I feel that?’
‘Worm?’ Beloved echoed.
‘It doesn’t matter Cam mumbled, lowering his gaze.
‘Have you seen the scars?’ Beloved asked him, reaching out to touch the right side of his face.
‘Scars?’ Cam mumbled. ‘No.’
‘How did you break your teeth?’ Beloved asked him suddenly.
‘I was beaten’ Cam answered in reply. ‘Twice. I…. first was given ceramic ones to replace…. but then it happened again and I…..uh…..’
‘You look ugly.’
Cam turned to her, his eyes pleading.
‘I cannot touch anything now’ he whispered, tears running freely down his cheeks now. ‘I cannot feel anything in my hands again.’
‘You’re thinking about Lucy’ Beloved realised. ‘The woman you love.’
Cam turned away then, his left side twitching involuntarily.
‘She will love you still’ Beloved continued, ‘whether or not you are a broken man. The heart sees past trivial things like this.’
Cam let out a sigh, closing his eyes and silent tears continued to roll down his cheeks
‘Don’t be sad’ she said to him. ‘You're still alive, aren’t you?’
‘If you can call this living’ Cam whispered.
Beloved lowered her eyes then.
‘At least…’ she began, ‘you have someone that cares for you.’

Many months later

‘Cam’ Brioke spoke out, ‘come over here.’
Cam turned in the corridor, heading back towards the office, back to Brioke. It had been a lonely day for him, and he had spent most of his time that day reading. Now, in this dream, this memory, he was just fourteen years old again.
Brioke leant back against the desk with a cruel smile.

‘Close the door’ he told Cam, ‘and make sure its locked.’
Cam did as he was told, closing the door and locking it before turning back to face Brioke.
‘Come here’ Brioke told him quietly.
Cam approached him.
‘Get on your knees.’
Cam did as he was told, kneeling before Brioke with his head bowed, sitting back on his heels.
Brioke hummed to himself in pleasure, touching himself between the legs, caressing himself.
Cam glanced up to see that he was already hard.
Cam’s eyes flickered back down, he felt physically tired, incredibly tired, but he felt no emotions inside him.
Brioke unbuttoned himself, reaching out to caress the back of Cam’s head.
‘Suck it’ he ordered. ‘There’s a good boy.’
Cam opened his mouth, not resisting.
He flinched, tasting him. It tasted disgusting.
Cam remained on his knees as Brioke thrust into him again and again. Cam’s eyes were out of focus, his arms limp by his side as Brioke did this to him.

Cam opened his eyes to see Beloved leaning over him.
‘Hey’ she said with a smile. ‘What were you thinking about?’
Cam sat up quickly, hand going to his head. A lot of time had passed since the accident, and he had gotten used to his new arm now, he barely even noticed it. As had been the case with his first arm, his left arm, the mechanical one.
‘Nothing’ Cam mumbled. ‘I wasn’t thinking about anything.’
‘You had fallen asleep’ Beloved gleamed. ‘Well I guess it’s no surprise, we have been very busy lately.’
‘I can’t remember the last full night’s sleep I had’ Cam mumbled.
‘It’s about to happen’ Beloved breathed, her expression becoming serious. ‘Are you ready?’
Cam straightened up then, tensing slightly, before rising to his feet.
‘Let’s go’ he said, staring off into the distance. ‘Let’s get this over with.’
‘This is gonna be tough’ Beloved warned him. ‘This isn’t like any other creature we’ve encountered before.’
‘I know that’ Cam said. ‘I’m fully aware.’
Beloved looked back at him.

The clouds swirled in the heavens above, growing and spreading wide until they blocked out the sun, and the world was shrouded in darkness.
Cam watched calmly as black shapes moved through the air around him, like shards of broken metal, or jagged tentacles, or claws growing from deformed hands.
He saw a man before him, running his way and stumbling, his face that of a man stricken with a panic, and a pure primal terror born of prey. He fell, landing on his front and pushing himself up, raising his head then, eyes widening at the sight of Cam.

‘Please…’ he uttered. ‘Please…help me….’
He gasped suddenly as a great spike was driven through him. Forced back down to the ground, the black shape that glided through air twisted in his body, jerking to the side to cause as much damage as possible and kill the man.
The unfortunate soul let out a final breath and became still.
Cam stared at the man, watching the whole process without reaction, once the man was dead, his attention flickered up again, and to a shape that was forming out of the blackness before him.
Shadows began to gather, collecting together until Cam recognised the silhouette as that of a woman’s.
The blackness gained colour and became solid, moving closer towards Cam until it eventually appeared as if it were real.
‘Cam’ spoke the shadows. ‘My love.’
‘You are not her’ Cam growled as he gazed at the beautiful, slender red-haired figure. ‘You are not Lucy.’
‘You were thinking about her’ the demon said, moving closer and caressing his face. ‘Weren’t you.’
Cam didn’t answer. He didn’t react at all. Not meeting the demon’s eyes, not pulling away.
‘I can see your deepest thoughts and desires’ the demon continued in a whisper, leaning closer still. ‘I know what you think…. even before you think it… I can delve deep into your subconscious.’
The demon stepped back suddenly, stumbling. When next the demon straightened, it had taken on another form. That of his brother, covered in blood.
‘Cam’ Luke moaned in agony. ‘How could you do this to me?’
Cam drew forth his magic, sending it in a wave towards the figure, attacking the spot where it stood.
The shadows dissipated in a howl that faded on the breeze.
Cam stood still, watching passively as the figure vanished from before him.
He turned, feeling a presence behind him, hearing movement.
He was knocked onto his back as the demon struck him. Cam stared up at the black sky above as the demon; transforming back into Lucy again, bore over him. Descending upon him it lowered in the air as if sinking through water, red hair waving slowly through the air in a dreamlike fashion.
‘Cam…’ the demon spoke in Lucy’s voice.
‘How dare you pretend to be her’ Cam snarled at the demon. ‘How dare you taint her image.’
The demon only chuckled at this. ‘Are you going to kill me?’
Cam narrowed his eyes, his body began to glow as he channelled his magic towards the demon above him, but to no effect.
The demon chuckled again.
‘I am stronger than you’ it told him. ‘You cannot hurt me.’
Cam didn’t speak, only increased his magic, trying, struggling, to hurt it. But the demon only tensed its body, jerking its body from side to side as if it only tickled.
‘Stop’ the demon smirked. ‘You cannot hurt me.’
Cam dropped his magic as the demon leant further over him.

He felt Lucy's breasts press against his chest, the feel of her hips.
'You lust for her' the demon told him as Cam lay there calmly. 'You want to feel her, to touch her again…' the demon transformed into Luke suddenly, 'you want to see your brother again…'
Cam met the demon's glare, narrowing his eyes.
'How do I know these things?' the demon spoke. It leant closer, whispering into his ear. 'I know your thoughts…even before you think them.' The demon sneered cruelly. 'I am going to kill you!' he cackled. 'You are going to die today…here and now….' it grabbed him roughly by the hair, tightening its grip. 'There is no one here to save you!' it screamed at him happily. 'I am going to make you suffer…I am going to make you *DEAD*!'
Cam didn't react as he stared up at the demon.
'Do you not fear me?' the demon asked him. 'Will you not beg for your life?'
'You know my thoughts' Cam replied calmly, 'you know my past. You know what's happened to me. I will not beg. Not even if you torture me. It would make no different, you would only kill me anyway. I will not beg.'
'But don't you want to see your brother again?' the demon taunted. 'I *might* spare your life if you beg.'
'I won't.'
'Say please.'
'I won't.'
'Beg me.'
'No!'
The demon leant back. 'You would not beg to save your life?'
'You wouldn't spare me even if I did.'
The demon sneered. 'You will die then, and you will *never* see your dear brother again…nor your beloved Lucy.'
Cam blinked back tears, as his eyes began to water.
'You will die' the demon told him. 'You will die…I will kill you here today.'
Cam felt a sharp touch press against the skin of his belly.
'Beg me' the demon said.
'No.'
The demon sneered, pressing the sharp point further downwards, forcing it into him, slowly piercing his flesh.
Cam cried out, trying to push the demon away from him. The demon began to twist the sharp point that pierced his body, causing more pain.
'Beg me!' the demon screeched at him. 'Beg me to spare your life.'
'Never!' Cam screamed back.
The demon grabbed him suddenly by the throat, claws wrapped around his chin so that he could not move his head. Cam gasped as he saw before him, the sharp talon of one of the demon's claws pointed towards his eye. It drew closer; Cam could do nothing, not attack, nor flee or protect himself. The demon paused for a moment, before plunging the point downwards and piercing his eye.
'Beg me!' the demon howled. 'Beg me!'

‘No!’ Cam screamed, grasping the demon as it held him down, blood streaming from his wounded eye. ‘I won’t beg! I won’t beg! I won’t beg! I won’t beg!’
‘Do you not fear me?’ the demon asked again.
‘There is no person…’ Cam groaned in agony, ‘no *creature* that I fear... I fear no being.’
‘That is not true’ the demon purred knowingly. ‘There is……one person you fear.’
Cam looked back at the demon.
His heart stopped in his chest, his skin went ice cold and his eyes wide, as he stared back at the face of Brioke.
‘Hello Cam’ Brioke purred.
‘No’ Cam trembled, ‘you're not him……Brioke is dead.’
‘I am the Brioke you remember from your past’ the demon gleamed. ‘Exact…in every singly way.’
Cam flinched as the demon touched him, moving it hand down his body and to his groin.
‘You're a good boy’ the demon said to him beginning to caress him, ‘you know that?’
Cam shuddered, fear heightening within him. He fought to be strong, fought to distance himself from the boy he used to be. The victim.
‘Don’t touch me’ Cam whispered, squeezing his eyes tight shut and tilting his head back, trying to pull away from the demon.
The demon only sniggered, unbuttoning his trousers and slipping its hands into his breeches.
Cam turned his head away as the demon touched him, caressed him.
‘This body’ the demon smiled cruelly, ‘belongs to me. Your body belongs to me…you are *mine*.’
Anger suddenly flickered in him.
‘Call me master’ the demon whispered into his ear.
Cam didn’t reply, only gritted his teeth, turning his head away. He gasped suddenly, eyes wide and body tense as he felt something thrust into him, though his clothes remained on.
‘No…’ Cam whispered. ‘Stop.’
‘You're a good lad’ the demon sneered, continuing for several minutes before pulling back.
Cam opened his eyes, letting out a breath. He thought for a split second that the demon had ceased its attack, but then he experienced a sudden pain. Cam rolled onto his side as he felt the demon kick him several times in the stomach, worsening the injury in his belly, as the demon had pierced him all the way through. He felt the pain.
The demon grabbed his head suddenly; Cam stared up between the demon’s fingers at the beast. Everything went black.

The next that Cam saw, he was someplace else.
He was standing in a familiar hall. His old home. The palace.
He heard a noise, turning towards it and seeing two young boys standing halfway up the stairs. Two young boys who looked very similar. Twins.
‘Let’s go see father’ one said.
‘Yeah!’ the other cried happily, dropping his toy sword and running down the stairs after the other one.
They ran past Cam, completely oblivious to him. Cam turned as they went by, watching them go.

The vision changed then. Suddenly Cam was standing in a dark room, watching the two boys leaning over the bed.
'Mother told us not to visit' Luke told the man who rested in the bed. 'But we didn't listen.'
'We're worried about you' the young Cam added. 'We had to come and see you.'
His father heaved himself up, propping himself back against the bed in a sitting position.
'Don't worry boys' the king smiled weakly at them, resting a hand on each of their heads. 'Everything will be alright in the end. I'll be fine.'
The next Cam saw, was himself standing in the pouring rain beside his mother the queen, on her other side was Luke. Cam watched, as the coffin was lowered into the ground.
'Mother' the young Cam said. 'Why are they putting him in the ground? He said he will get better. He said he would be fine.'
'He said he would be fine' Luke repeated, beginning to cry now, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand.
'Time heals all wounds' Cam spoke, turning to the demon beside him. 'This does not pain me anymore. You should know this.'
The demon appearing as Brioke stood beside him, smiling. It glanced at Cam for a moment, before facing ahead again.
The scene changed again.
They were in a different place now. Cam saw his young self again. At the mercy of the Brioke of the past.
'I will teach you the price of disobedience' the old Brioke spat, grasping the young Cam by the hair and slamming his head back against the wall, beating him and kicking him, worsening the pain and injuries he already had. The injuries Brioke had given him the day before.
Eventually Brioke dragged him into an empty room, rounding on him again, shoving him forwards so that the young Cam leant over the table.
The young Cam stifled a sob as Brioke began to unbuckle his belt, pressing a hand forcefully upon his back so he could not push himself up.
'I've told you' Cam said to the demon beside him. 'This was a long time ago. It pains me no more.'
The young Cam gritted his teeth as Brioke thrust into him again and again, balling his fists and squeezing his eyes tight shut as tears began to seep from his closed eyes.
'Oh really?' the demon smirked knowingly.
The scene shifted perspective, and Cam's heart jolted suddenly in his chest. He gasped, staring in shock at the figure of the young Luke, standing in the doorway and watching, as Brioke raped him.
The young Luke stepped back, turning he ran away.
'He saw that' the demon smiled happily. 'Your dear brother…whom you love with all your heart…he knew exactly what was happening to you…he knew for years….and yet….' the demon turned to face Cam, '…he did *nothing*.'
The scene darkened, until they stood now only in shadow.
Cam bowed his head. 'I know what you are trying to do' Cam whispered. 'I know you are trying to hurt me…to turn me against my brother….to make me doubt……. but it won't work!' Cam turned towards the demon now, facing him head on.

‘I have made that mistake before. My brother loves me, and I love him. And I will never doubt him again. And I will never hurt him, no matter what. When we were young we were both scared. Luke didn’t know what to do. It was not his fault that I suffered. I do not blame him. Not in the slightest.’
‘Your words are true’ the demon acknowledged, visibly disappointed. ‘The love you have for your twin is strong.’ He moved closer to him. ‘But did you know…’ the demon continued, ‘that he was not the only one who knew your suffering….there are others…who *toyed* with you.’
Cam saw a vision then of several masked figures then, watching his younger self nursing his injuries, after Brioke had beaten him.
The scene changed again. He saw his older self, his self from only a few months ago, caressing Virgil.
‘Cam’ Virgil whispered in the vision. ‘I want you to take me.’
The other Cam’s breath caught in his throat as he gazed down at Virgil. Virgil smiled, reaching up and brushing the other Cam’s hair back. ‘You're so beautiful.’
The other Cam caught his hand before it dropped, nuzzling into it.
‘I love you Virgil. I always have.’
‘Then show me.’
The other Cam leant back, moving suddenly as he pulled Virgil over to lie on his front. Virgil began to laugh as the other Cam pulled him into a kneeling position, Virgil on all fours now.
The other Cam’s hand moved down his body, he leant over Virgil, whispering into his ear.
‘Relax.’
Virgil smiled as the other Cam pushed himself forwards, moaning in pleasure.
As he watched the vision, the memory play out, Cam tilted his head, not understanding why he was being shown this. He glanced at the demon beside him without expression, seeing the demon gleam knowingly back. Cam returned his attention to the vision.
Virgil smiled kindly back at the other Cam, before leaving, speaking final words to him.
‘I love you too…Cam.…’
Cam watched the vision, and saw as Virgil left the room, closing the door after him.
Cam watched, as Virgil walked away, pulling from his coat a crows mask and placing it on his face.
Cam gasped, recognising the mask. ‘No…’
The vision of Virgil cast his hand out, opening a doorway of light, a portal to another world, and stepping in.
‘He was just toying with you’ the demon sniggered happily. ‘He never really loved you.’
‘You can’t make me doubt’ Cam spoke to the demon. ‘I loved Virgil, and he loved me.’
‘And yet he deceived you.’
Cam turned to face the demon.
‘They have watched you for a very long time, the masked figures. They have watched you for years…since you were a young boy.’ The demon sneered cruelly. ‘Since you were a child, they watched your suffering, and did nothing…’
‘You cannot hurt me like this’ Cam told the demon coolly. ‘You cannot make me doubt, and I am done talking to you.’

Cam summoned his magic then. A great wave of light. Millions of tiny shards rolling through the air.
He sent them towards the demon beside him, and Brioke suddenly vanished.
But Cam had no doubt that the thing was still there, was near him still, waiting.

Cam opened his eyes to see the rolling black clouds above him.
It had been a dream, all of it. Save for the physical injuries he had suffered. The stab wound through his eye and belly.
The pain was sharp.
The demon lunged for him then, furious it had not been able to hurt him, it clawed at him, tore at his flesh, and made him bleed.
Cam struggled to defend himself, still lying on his back, still in pain from his injuries. He cast his magic out, using as much as he possibly could to attack the demon.
But the demon was stronger. If Cam lay there much longer, he would die.
But the demon vanished suddenly without warning. Cam blinked in surprise, the pain in his wounded eye was excruciating, the blood still fresh. Cam could feel its warm touch as it trickled down his face.
He rolled over, pushing himself up gingerly. He saw Beloved running towards him.
'Cam!' she called out, slowing to a stop a short distance away.
It had been her that had attacked the demon while it was distracted clawing at Cam. It had been her that had saved him, had saved his life.
'Can you stand?' Beloved asked him as Cam with his back to her, rose slowly to his feet. 'Can you fight?'
Cam straightened, gritting his teeth in determination.
He turned to face Beloved, his wounded eye still bleeding heavily.
'You're hurt' Beloved said, staring at the wound in his belly.
'Pain is in the mind' Cam told her in a grumble. He raised his head. 'Let's kill this son of a bitch.'
Beloved expression broke into a wide smile, and they turned together, to face the demon that was materializing before them.
'Cam!' came Lucy's voice as the demon took on her form. 'I love you! Please don't hurt me!'
Cam lashed out at the spectre without hesitation, his strike hitting nothing.
A laugh began to grow in the air around them, echoing through the world, through their very minds.
Fools it said to them, *to think you even stand a chance*.
Cam and Beloved threw their head back, staring up at the clouds.
I will crush both of you. I will make you suffer before you die.
'Yeah right' Beloved sneered. 'Cam!' she barked, reaching her hand out for him to take.
Cam glanced to her open hand, he didn't hesitate to grasp it, suddenly glowing, his skin shining, his cloths brightening in colour. He furrowed his brow, a slight sneer playing about his lips as a sudden wind, brought on by his magic whipped around them, lashing their clothes about.
Cam glanced back up at the monster, his hair now pure white lifting frim his eyes.

He felt no fear as he lifted himself in the air, guided by his magic, his feet left the floor, and he flew suddenly upwards, pulling Beloved with him who screamed in delight, laughing with insanity.
The beast they faced now was a colossus, a size beyond comprehension. Beloved and Cam were mere ants to it. It looked almost human in shape, with colossal horns, a muscular body and a great mane that ran around its neck and back. Its long tail snapped through the air with a crack, and its movement was slow and arduous as it moved forwards, bent on destruction as creatures spawned in the hundreds at its feet through holes in the ground.
Cam's body glowed so bright that his entire figure appeared as a blinding silhouetted, Beloved beside him still holding his hand, supported by his magic, was enveloped in darkness, her hair grown long like tentacles whipped around violently.
Cam grasped her arm by both hands now, swinging her around and throwing her with all his might towards the monster.
Beloved flew through the air, a tentacle shooting out and circling one of the creature's horns, swinging around to land on its head. She leapt down, attacking the weak spot, in the most agonising way possible.
She used her magic to burn the creatures eye right out of its head.
The creature screamed in pain and rage, it whipped its head sharply to the side then, causing Beloved to fall, before swallowing her whole.
Cam still hovering in the air a distance away watched passively as Beloved was ingested.
He glanced lazily down at the hundreds of monsters below him, before blinking slowly, and looking back up at the colossus before him. His entire silhouette glowing, he looked angelic.
Cam summoned his magic to him, tearing forwards through the air at impossible speed, and tearing into the soft membrane of the creature's other eye, going far into its head and killing it from the inside.
Cam could barely hear the creatures roar of panic and pure agony, to him, inside the creature's head, surrounded by blood and gore, everything seemed sort of peaceful.
He cut downwards, heading down the creature's throat and aiming towards its heart, where he struck his final blow. He concentrated his attack outwards after that, disintegrating the creatures very flesh, as its body began to decay and rot away in seconds around him, Cam reached out one last time.
'……Beloved…'
He grabbed her by the wrist, hugging her to him. She had fallen into the creature's stomach, its acid beginning to quickly eat away at her. But she would live.
Cam exited the creatures body, carrying Beloved in his arms. He landed gently, turning back to the creature with frightening calmness, ignoring the monsters around him that turned to face him.
'You will corrupt this world no longer' Cam said, placing Beloved gently on the earth and straightening again. 'You will all die here, and you will never return to this world.'
Cam's body vanished suddenly into thin air, his consciousness left him, as he became, something else, something he could not have described. He was no longer in his own body, he was the wind, he was the air and the earth and the clouds above.
Cam used his powers to slowly suffocate the monsters, leaving behind nothing but a field of ash, and smoke.

Cam glanced beside him, heart stopping inside his chest at the sight of Beloved lying face down and not moving.
'Beloved!' he ran to her, pulling back suddenly.
He stopped when he saw a masked and cloaked figure standing before him.
'It's alright' the male figure told him. 'She is alive. She'll be fine. She's just unconscious.'
Cam glanced beside him, where he saw another masked and cloaked figure. He turned on the spot, seeing another figure, then another. He was surrounded.
Cam did a full turn before facing the first figure again.
'There are eight of you' Cam said flatly.
'That's right' the masked figure said. 'We've been watching you near enough your whole life.'
'I know' Cam said quietly. 'I know…' He raised his head. 'Virgil!' he said. 'I know you are among us.'
The masked, hooded figures fell silent in surprise. And then many of them turned to face a single one, and Cam turned to face this figure too.
The figure raised his hand to his mask, pulling it away and revealing his face.
Cam stared into the face of Vergil.
Vergil smiled. 'Hey kid.'
Cam turned angrily away, gritting his teeth. 'The demon was right' he said. 'You deceived me.'
'No' Vergil said, moving closer to him. 'My love for you was true and honest. I loved you, and I still do.'
He reached towards Cam, placing his hand around the back of his head and pulling him closer, as he leant forward and kissed him.
Around them, the other masked figures watched mutely.
Vergil pulled back.
'Cam' he breathed. 'I love you.'
He drew his hand away, stepping back.
'What happens now?' Cam asked him.
'I think…' Vergil spoke slowly, 'that we own you an explanation. You deserved that much at least.'
Vergil moved away, casting his hand out and opening a portal, a doorway to another world before him.
'Come' Vergil said turning back to him. 'Let us show you our own world, our home.'
The other masked figures walked forwards, stepping through the door of light and vanishing one by one until only Vergil and Cam were left.

Cam hesitated, moving away from the portal for a moment and towards Beloved.
He knelt beside her, taking her head in his hands. She was still unconscious, but he could see her breathing.
'She will be fine' Vergil said behind him.
'Do you promise?' Cam asked him, stroking her cheek with his metal hand and feeling nothing. 'Do you promise she will be alright?'
'Yes' Vergil answered. 'I promise.'
Cam leant forward, kissing her on the cheek.
'Thank you' he whispered to her unconscious body. 'Thank you for everything.'
He rose to his feet, returning to Vergil's side.
They exchanged a glance.
'Are you ready?' Vergil asked him quietly.
'Yeah' Cam nodded. 'I'm ready.'
Vergil turned away from him, stepping forwards into the portal.
Cam followed after him, without hesitation.
He followed the masked figures onwards, to places new.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Cam stepped forwards into the new world. He tilted his head towards the sun above him, though feeling no warmth upon his face. The air around him was neither cool, nor warm, and there was no breeze whatsoever. It just…was.
'What is this place?' Cam spoke aloud. 'This place feels different.'
'This place?' one of the masked figures said, glancing about his surroundings as if he had only just noticed them. 'We call this place, Lacklustre Paradise.'
Cam turned to the masked figure, whose voice was male. Around them the other masked figures stood, and beside him was Vergil, the only one without his mask.
'That's a strange name.' Cam commented.
'It is' the nameless figure said. 'But it's been called that before I came here, long before any of us can remember.'
'Why don't you show your faces?' Cam asked suddenly, glancing towards the others.
'Well…the truth is' the nameless figure began with a smile, 'even the writer hasn't decided on our characters, that is why we are never specifically described, and why our names often change.'
'What?'
'I can see her now' the nameless figure continued simply, 'sitting before her laptop in her pyjamas with a coffee sitting beside her……in her world it's nearly Christmas.'

‘What?’ Cam said again.
‘Never mind’ the other laughed. ‘Don’t concern yourself with such things.’
Cam frowned uncertainly. ‘What's Christmas?’
‘A waste of time and money’ the figure answered quickly. ‘You don’t need it to spend time with your family. And the songs they overplay! All I want for Christmas is to crawl into a hole until it’s all over!’
‘Hmmm’ Cam turned away, having lost all sense in the man.
‘All of you’ Vergil spoke up, ‘I think you should leave. I wish to be alone with Cam.’
The masked figures began to drift away, Cam watched them go. One of them paused momentarily, staring at Cam, before moving on.
When Cam was alone with Vergil, he turned to him.
The forest around them was utterly still.
Vergil stared at Cam. The mask he held in his hand slipped from his fingers, and he strode up to Cam.
Vergil swept him up in his arms, kissing Cam deeply, as Cam kissed him back.
He tipped Cam back slowly, Cam kneeling allowed himself to be moved, lying back upon the knee-high grass as Vergil leant over him, running his hands over Vergil’s body, as Vergil began to unbuckle Cam’s belt.
Vergil pulled Cam’s trousers down, Cam did not resist as Vergil parted Cam’s legs, hooking his arm around underneath and lifting it, as he pushed into him.
Cam held Vergil around the neck as Vergil panted heavily, his rhythm fast. Beneath him Cam’s breath was quick, his cheeks flushed, as he moaned in pleasure.
Afterwards, they lay on their backs on the grass together, side by side.
‘I love you Cam’ Vergil spoke to the perfect blue sky above them. ‘I want you to know.’
Cam turned his head towards Vergil then.
‘I'm sorry that you’ve suffered so much’ Vergil went on. ‘I truly am.’
Cam looked to the sky again.
‘It doesn’t matter’ he replied. ‘It’s all in the past.’
Vergil rolled onto his side, leaning over Cam and kissing him again.
‘I'm so glad you're here’ Vergil told him. ‘Here at the end of all things.’ Vergil ran his fingers across Cam’s lips, staring at them.
Vergil sighed heavily then, resting his cheek against Cam’s chest and closing his eyes, holding Cam as he allowed his body to relax.
Cam stared up at the cloudless sky, feeling the comforting weight of Vergil’s body against his.
He closed his eyes, and his mind began to drift.

He woke sometime later. The sky above him was exactly the same as before, not lighter or darker. The trees above him were still utterly still, there was no breeze.
Everything was as it was before, in every single way.
Cam shook Vergil lightly, waking him up.
Vergil groaned, sitting up as Cam did the same.
The two exchanged a glance, staring at each other, before rising to their feet.

A short time later, and they were walking through the forest together.
‘There’s something not quite right about this place’ Cam was saying. ‘Everything….is too still.’
‘There is no wind in this world, ’Vergil explained, ‘or moving clouds.’
‘No clouds?’ Cam echoed, raising his head. ‘I hadn't noticed until now.’ He stopped suddenly, looking around. ‘I hear no birds’ he said in a distant voice. ‘There are no insects in the grass’ he said kneeling and parting the grass at his feet. Normally you would instantly see *something*. An ant. A spider. But here…’
There was nothing….
‘There are no living creatures in this world’ Vergil told him as Cam rose to his feet again, ‘…save for us.’
‘What do you eat?’ Cam asked the first thought coming to his mind.
‘Our food comes from other worlds’ Vergil smiled.
Cam slowly turned on the spot, looking all around him. This time he studied his surroundings far more closely.
He looked up, and looked down, and all around him.
‘The trees are all symmetrical’ he spoke aloud. ‘The grass is all exactly the same height…. the flowers are spaced exactly the same distance apart…’ he bowed his head, ‘…and the river…’ he said seeing a narrow river nearby, ‘…is utterly still.’
‘Nothing moves in this world’ Vergil explained, looking all around him at the forest. ‘This world was designed, not grown. It never changes.’
‘Designed…?’ Cam mumbled. ‘By who?’
‘I don’t know’ Vergil admitted. ‘This place is ancient…...its hundreds of billions of years old….or so we understand…’ He looked around. ‘It has never changed…not it all that time...’
‘Hundreds of billions?’ Cam echoed. ‘I can’t even imagine such length of time.’
He turned to Vergil.
‘Does this whole world look like this?’
‘No’ Vergil replied. ‘There is a lot of variation in this world…. let me show you.’
Cam followed Vergil through the still forest. Everything was silent, so eerie and strange, it felt like walking through a dream. Like none of this was real.
When they reached the edge of the forest minutes later, they stepped out into an open meadow, with rolling hills that stretched for miles around, and on the horizon, great grey mountains, in a perfect triangle-shapes, with a flattened peak.
Cam glanced to the right of him; then to the other side on his left, seeing the trees behind, the border of the forest, was perfectly straight in both directions.
He looked ahead again.
‘It’s beautiful…’ Cam said, ‘yet dead.’
Vergil reached for Cam, taking him by the hand. A flurry of light surrounded them, Cam was temporarily blinded.
When his vision cleared, he saw they stood in a different place altogether.
They stood on the slope of a mountain, the grass beneath their feet was short, and the tree beside them was without leaves, its branches spread out wide over the area around. And before them, over the edge of the cliff, was a smooth blanket of cloud, burning gold in the setting sun that hung in the sky behind.

‘I thought you said this world was never changing’ Cam said, watching the sheet of gold before him, and the setting sun.
‘The sun is always setting here’ Vergil told him, not letting go of his hand. ‘Time never changes; the seasons never change, but remain the same, all over this world.’
‘How big is this world?’
‘I've been here for a very long time’ Vergil said turning to him. ‘A very long time, and I have only seen a tiny portion of this world. This world…is colossal, larger by far than any world you have visited so far.’
The light rose at their feet again, and everything around them shone in a white light.
When it faded, they stood at a different place again, a dark place.
They stood now on the edge of a lake, a lake that was still like glass, reflecting the bright stars that shone in the sky above that was mottled black and dark blue and purple. The large moon that sat, only half-visible on the horizon, revealed its lower half on the lake below it, appearing as a perfect circle.
The black forest that sat on the edge of the lake, created a dark shape along the coast.
‘It’s beautiful’ Cam breathed as he gazed upon it. ‘So so beautiful.’
Vergil let go of Cam’s hand, turning to him.
Cam met his gaze.
Vergil moved closer to him, resting his hand on Cam’s shoulder and nuzzling into his neck.
‘Cam’ he breathed, running his hand up Cam’s neck, weaving his fingers through his hair, as his other hand snaked around his waist.
Cam didn’t react, as Vergil raised his head, whispering into his ear.
‘Sleep…’
Cam’s eyelids drooped, his body went limp.
Vergil caught him as he sunk to the ground, holding him in his arms.
Vergil held him there, cradling him, holding him close as he knelt over him.
‘Sleep’ Vergil said again, ‘rest…be at peace…’

Cam woke sometime later, opening his eyes he saw a ceiling above him.
He was inside.
Cam sat up, looking about him.
He was in a large white and silver hall, the windows around him were tall, through which nothing could be seen, only a sheet of white-gold light which shone through, lighting the hall within.
Cam swung his legs over the edge of the bed, looking down at himself. He wore now a black cloak, much like the one the other figures wore. Beneath the cloak he was naked.
‘You're awake’ came Vergil’s voice. ‘Good.’
‘What did you do to me?’ Cam asked him.
‘I brought you home’ Vergil replied simply. ‘This is where we live.’
Cam rose to his feet, tilting his head back. Above him the ceiling was a dome-shape, the rock completely smooth.
‘Why did you bring me here?’ Cam asked him.

‘We owe you an explanation’ Vergil said. ‘You know now that we’ve watched you for most of your life…we have abilities…the power to reach other worlds……I think you should know more.’
Vergil took a step back, turning and gliding away.
‘Follow me…’ he whispered back.
Cam obeyed.
They moved across the hall, slipping into a quiet room.
It was dim inside; and grew dimmer still when Vergil closed the door after them.
He turned to face Cam, gazing at him.
Cam raised his hand, running his thumb over Vergil’s lower lip.
Cam stepped forward and kissed him, pressing his body against Vergil’s, trapping him against the door.
Vergil kissed him back, moaning in pleasure.
Cam began untying Vergil’s laces that held his robes together, one by one moving further down his body.
‘Hold on’ Vergil breathed as Cam began to bite his neck.
‘No’ Cam spoke harshly. ‘I won’t wait, I want you now.’
He slipped Vergil’s robe down his shoulders, sneering as he saw he too was naked underneath. Cam took off his own cloak, moving up to Vergil again.
‘Don’t be so rough’ Vergil said as Cam grabbed him.
‘You're mine’ Cam said dragging him over to the bed and throwing him down upon it. ‘I can do whatever I want with you.’
He leaned over him, whispering into his ear.
‘Turn over.’
‘Hu?’
Cam did not wait to repeat himself. He grabbed Vergil by the arm and turned him over, moving on top of him and pulling him up so that he rested on his hands and knees.
‘Cam’ Vergil said calmly. ‘This is so unlike you.’
‘No’ Cam said. ‘This is very like the me I am now.’
He thrust into Vergil forcefully, Vergil moaned, gritting his teeth and balling the sheets in his fists.

‘Why did you toy with me?’ Cam asked as they lay side by side on the bed together. ‘Did you not care about helping me at all?’
‘Oh Cam’ Vergil smiled. ‘You were an adorable little idiot I just wanted to play with.’
‘I'm glad you all had so much fun with me’ Cam said flatly to the ceiling.
‘It’s just the way things are’ Vergil replied.
‘What was my crime?’ Cam grumbled. ‘To be born into the wrong family…at the wrong time…and suffer a series of unfortunate situations…’
‘Exactly’ Vergil smiled.
‘It’s really as simple as that?’
‘Yes’ Vergil replied. ‘It is.’
He rolled on top of Cam them, kissing him and running his hand down his body and between Cam’s legs.

‘You’ve had me now’ Vergil gleamed. ‘Now it’s my turn.’
He lifted Cam’s leg, running his hand down his chest before pushing into him. Cam threw his head back and groaned as Vergil began to thrust into him again and again, doing so forcefully and holding Cam tightly.

Afterwards Vergil lay on the bed resting. Cam rose and went over to the mirror nearby, it ran in a strip from ceiling to floor, and in it Cam could see his whole body.
He looked at himself, standing completely naked before the mirror.
He looked hideous.
There was severe scaring up his legs where he had been burned, on that day he had been sentenced to death, where believed he would die. The scars looked grotesque.
And then he looked up to his face.
He had several broken teeth from being beaten in days past. His eyes were milky white, one more so than the other, he was entirely bind in one eye where he had been stabbed by the demon and could only just about see out of the other eye, though only vague silhouettes were all that he could experience in the world now. Both his arms were mechanical, both from the shoulder down, and neither matched the other, as he had been given them by different people in different facilities. One arm he had lost when Beloved had torn it from him, the other had lost when he suffered an explosion that had scarred the entire half of his body and caused his partial blindness.
‘I was once so handsome’ Cam spoke mournfully to himself. ‘How could Lucy love me when I look like such a monster?’
Cam heard movement then and realised that Vergil had come up behind him.
‘If it’s true love’ Vergil said to him, ‘she will love you no matter what.’ He placed his hand upon Cam’s shoulder, turning him around to face him. ‘You’ve become the master you were meant to be, you can control your powers now. You are no longer the frightened boy who cowered beneath Brioke and so many others. Now you are strong, mighty.’
He smiled kindly at him then. Vergil was so beautiful, so handsome, and almost too perfect; his skin looked almost more like ceramic than it did actual skin.
‘It’s time to regain your crown, as the mighty king you were meant to be.’
‘I will’ Cam replied glumly, turning back to the mirror before him. ‘But…I have to see Lucy first.’
He stared at his reflection again.
‘Don’t worry’ Vergil told him, ‘if it’s true love, then she will love you no matter what you look like.’
‘And if she doesn’t?’
‘Then it wasn’t meant to be.’
‘Vergil’ Cam said turning to him. ‘Why do *you* love me? I love Lucy and she loved me because we knew each other for a long time…and over that time we slowly drew closer as we got to know one another. But…when you kissed me for the first time…it was so sudden……why…why did you do it?’
‘Because I've known you for far longer than you realise’ Vergil replied without a pause.
‘And you still love me?’ Cam asked him. ‘Even though I look like this?’
‘I do’ Vergil replied. ‘Because its true love.’

Chapter Thirty-Three

Cam went away after that, he returned to his own world, the world he had been born in.
'She is in a town' Vergil told him solemnly, as they stood side by side in this world. 'This town is three miles that way' he pointed.
'Why didn't you take me there then?' Cam asked him. 'Why are we out here?'
'Cam' Vergil spoke seriously.
Cam glanced towards him, feeling a nervous twinge in his stomach at his tone.
'I have to tell you something about Lucy.' He took a deep breath, before continuing. 'She is married now.'

The wind was gentle around the plains. A skylark sang above them somewhere, hidden from view, and the tall grass that grew around their feet danced back and forth.
Cam stared at a lady bird, sitting on a leaf by his feet.
He raised his head, eyes distant as he stared away.
'There is something else' Vergil spoke hesitantly.
'I don't want to know' Cam said firmly. 'I…. I don't care.'
Vergil turned to face him. 'Are you going to be alright?'
'I know you will be watching me' Cam said, ignoring the question. 'You're always watching me, even more so now.'
He simply walked away from Vergil, without another world.
Vergil watched him go.

Cam walked slowly as he headed towards the town.
He reached it at last, standing at the town entrance, the tall iron gates stood open, allowing traffic to file slowly back and forth, he realised suddenly that he did not know exactly where Lucy was.
A bird suddenly appeared on his shoulder then, a little black bird.
Cam turned to face it, his expression blank.
'Vergil…' he said. 'You can control birds now?'
The bird fluttered away, coming to stop at the top of the iron gate, watching him.
Cam stepped forwards, following the bird as it flew from one post to another, leading him further into the town.
It took several minutes, but after this agonizing time, the little bird stopped at last for the final time, now coming to rest on the floor before the door to one of the homes.
Cam stared at the little bird for several seconds, reluctant to approach. But he resigned himself to what he must and stepped forward.
The black bird fluttered up and away and was lost from sight, but Cam paid it no more attention, instead fixed his sights only on the door before him.

Is she really here? He thought desperately to himself. *Am I really going to see her again?*
He stopped before the door, heart hammering inside his chest.
He felt sick with nerves, wanting only to turn and walk away.
He let out a sigh, bowing his head and closing his eyes.
How long has it been? Cam thought to himself. *It's been years…*
He knocked on the door suddenly, forcing himself to do so, feeling so scared inside.
He felt so relaxed around monsters, so calm, as if he were doing nothing more than eating breakfast. Killing had become a second nature to him, and blood and violence meant nothing to him anymore.
This was different.
Nothing could faze him anymore, except for this.
He closed his eyes as he heard movement from inside the home, muffled footsteps heading towards the door.
He raised his head as the door opened, and he saw her standing there.

Time seemed to stop for Cam suddenly as he stared at her, he could make out her shape, his eyes had never recovered fully, but he knew it was her, he could see her beautiful hair, orange like the setting sun.
His chest rose and fell as he stared back at her, wide-eyed. He squinted then, tilting his head to the side slightly in an attempt to see her better.
She backed away from him, Cam's hand reaching out to hold the door open as he entered, his footfalls heavy as he stepped forward.
'W-who are you?' she stammered.
Cam felt a jolt in his heart then as he realised.
'You're afraid of me?' he whispered. 'I'm sorry. I know I've changed.'
She stood there frozen, leaning back against the table behind her.
'I must look awful' Cam mumbled.
He straightened then, hearing Lucy's slow gasp.
'Cam…...?' she leant forwards then, stepping closer to him to get a better look at his face. 'Is that really you?'
Cam looked to the floor, breathing slowly, before looking back up at her.
'It's really me' he spoke quietly. 'I know it's been a very long time.'
'What happened to you?'
'I….' Cam shook his head. 'I can't explain, it's too much…'

They sat in the garden at the back of the house, the ground before them dipped down to a stream some distance away, there were trees scattered in sparse groups about the place, and beyond that was open land.
'It's nice here' Cam mumbled, though it was not the landscape that he saw, there were other things he felt here.
It was still here, he could tell this much, and the breeze felt cool, the air fresh, and as he breathed deeply inwards, he smelt the faintest scene of salt.
He turned to his left, turning away from Lucy and narrowing his eyes as he stared away.
'Is the ocean close by?' he asked.
'Its…' Lucy began, 'just over there.'
Cam looked back at her, seeing her pointing in the direction he had been looking.
He looked away again, back towards this way. He saw blue there on the horizon but could not tell if it was sea or sky.
'I thought you might have been dead' Cam began, still looking away. 'Gods it feels like so long ago' he mumbled. 'That manor…. I hardly remember it.'
'It's been about five years' Lucy spoke quietly, hugging herself and staring down at her lap. 'I um….'
'I learned later on that you were alive' Cam told her. 'I wanted to see you but…'
'Why didn't you come back?' Lucy asked him. 'Why didn't you try to find me? I thought you were dead.'
'Oh Lucy…'
Cam turned to face her now at last, a sad smile upon his face.
'Oh' he said again. 'I couldn't even begin to tell you how much I have suffered throughout my life, since my childhood, before the incident at that manor, after I lost you…'
He raised his hands before his face now, staring at the metallic surfaces, each arm mismatched from the other.
He brought his hands to his face then, touching his skin.
'I can't feel' he mumbled, 'I can't touch again.'
'What happened to you?' Lucy asked, her voice a little timid.
'I lost my arm in an incident' Cam mumbled, 'and then something else happened. I was given these arms by different groups, different people. That is why they are different from each other.'
Lucy's eyes dropped then, staring at his metallic arms. 'I've never seen anything like it before' she whispered.
'Lucy' Cam began seriously. 'There is…. ah…. there's so much I want to tell you, so much but…I don't think you will understand…. how can I truly convey to you what I want to you?'
He bowed his head.
'You believe in magic' he said to her, 'don't you?'
'Yes.' Lucy mumbled. 'You showed me, your skin…' she raised her head to him. 'Your skin glowed. I saw that, you have magic, you *are* magic.'
'I am stronger than I could possibly show you that I am…. not that I would want to, I would probably frighten you…scare you away.' He paused. 'I would not want such a thing.'
'I'm not frightened of you' Lucy told him.

‘You aren’t?’ Cam raised his hand to his head, covering his eye briefly before lowering his hand, he felt like he was seeing through a veil. ‘I’m glad’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t want to frightened you.’
Lucy watched him closely, waiting for him to speak.
‘You believe in magic’ Cam repeated, ‘you have seen it with your own eyes.’ He paused then, the skin around his eyes twitching as he stared down at his lap, leaning his elbows on his knees, hands together. ‘Do you believe’ Cam began, wondering how to start, how to put into words what he wanted to say. ‘Do you believe in other worlds?’
‘Other worlds?’ Lucy echoed. ‘You mean like a heaven or an afterlife?’
‘No’ Cam shook his head, ‘not a heaven, just other worlds.’
Lucy did not answer, she watched him with a level expression.
‘There are so many worlds out there, more than you could possibly imagine.’
Cam paused for a moment to gather his thoughts, blinking slowly.
‘Have you read about such things in books’ Cam began, ‘other worlds I mean?’
‘Um…yes. I’ve not read as many books as you I’m sure’ Lucy said, ‘but I don’t have time to read nowadays, my mother used to read….’ She trailed off then, silent for a moment, before closing her mouth, just smiling back at Cam.
Cam narrowed his eyes, squinting at her.
‘Are you smiling?’
‘Your eyesight is really that bad?’ Lucy asked with concern. ‘What happened to you Cam, what happened?’
Her tone cut him deeply, and Cam had to grit his teeth, holding his breath for a moment as he fought to control himself.
‘I um…’ his voice broke, ‘I…’ he drew a slow breath. ‘I can’t see at all through one of my eyes, I am completely blind in one eye.’
He turned away for a moment, before facing Lucy again.
‘I travelled to other worlds’ he told her, ‘and saw things you couldn’t possibly imagine, things that have not been invented yet, things of the future, methods of transport, communication, the very buildings and roads themselves were different’ Cam breathed. ‘That is where is met ghouls, creatures that eat human flesh. They sound like monsters… but turned out to be far more human than I realised they could be.’ He fell silent for a moment, blinking again. ‘After that world, I went to another where I was…where I…. learned to release my powers to their fullest. Oh Lucy’ he breathed. ‘I did incredible things, I…. killed people…tore whole buildings apart.’ He gritted his teeth then, choking back a sob as his body jerked suddenly, an action Cam hardly realised but that Lucy did, though she said nothing. ‘I didn’t think I would survive the ordeal’ Cam continued in a mumble, ‘but I did…with a little help from my friends.’ He smirked at himself. ‘If you could call them that, those strange black figures. It doesn’t matter.’ He quickly changed the subject before Lucy could question him. ‘The last world I came to, was the one that…. mmm’ he frowned to himself. ‘This is where I learned to control the magic that had been released from my body. This world is where I met Beloved, whom I initially believed to be the devil herself, but…I have learnt so much because of what I have experienced in my time. She helped me, Beloved…that strange creature.’ Cam let out a sigh, bowing his head. ‘I didn’t get to say goodbye to her.’ He turned

to Lucy at last again with a sad smile. ‘I wanted to see you’ he told her, ‘I wanted to see you again, I thought of you often.’
‘Cam’ Lucy began seriously. ‘I…need to tell you something, but this might not be easy because…I don’t know what you expected of me because…you were gone for so long.’
‘What are you saying?’ Cam asked nervously.
‘You’ve been gone for what must be five years’ Lucy told him. ‘I’m married now.’
Cam felt like he had been stabbed in the chest, unable to breath for the longest time.
He turned away silently, bowing his head, his black hair falling over his eyes.

Cam sat upon the low wall within the wide streets of the town. The fence behind dividing the street in two, on the other side of the fence just behind Cam grew a tree, its shade shielding Cam from the sunlight.
He raised his head then, seeing a figure moving close by him, heading towards the home that Lucy lived in.
The man as he watched, approached the house. Cam saw the door open, saw Lucy’s orange hair as she stepped out. The two figures moved close together, before heading inside together. The door closed after them.
‘Does it hurt?’ the masked figure asked Cam, sitting beside him.
‘Did you know about this?’ Cam replied. ‘It doesn’t matter if we knew’ the figure said in response, ‘one way or the other. It doesn’t make any difference.’
‘Doesn’t make any difference?’ Cam gritted his teeth. ‘I didn’t want it to be true.’
‘What would you want us to do?’ the masked figure replied. ‘Stop her finding love, keep people away from her, make her alone?’
Cam turned away.
‘You were gone for a very long time’ the figure replied. ‘She continued to live her normal life after a while, but she never forgot about you, but at the same time…she didn’t want to stop living.’
Cam didn’t answer, he just sat quietly on the low wall, anyone passing by would have seen that he was sitting alone, the masked figure completely invisible to all but him.
‘I…’ Cam began, ‘I don’t know what to do.’
‘Why don’t you go and visit your brother?’ the masked figure suggested.
‘Luke…’ he bowed his head. ‘Would he want to see me?’ Cam buried his head in his hands.
‘My mind is so messed up’ his moaned. ‘I can’t think straight. I don’t know what to do.’
‘Perhaps you just need some time alone’ the masked figure suggested.
‘You’re not going to do anything to me are you?’ Cam asked the figure with suspicion.
‘No’ the figure replied. ‘We aren’t going to mess with you anymore. You are on your own from here’ he told him, ‘though we will help you if you need.’ He paused. ‘There is an empty house on the edge of this town’ he told him then. ‘It’s yours.’

A little bird fluttered down from the tree above them then, landing on Cam's knee. It was vivid red in colour.
'Follow the bird' the masked figure told him, rising and turning to walk away. 'It will take you to the home, there…. you can rest and piece together your thoughts. You've been through so much, it must be difficult and strange for you to return to your own world like this, after so many years of being away.'
Cam straightened, taking his hands away from his eyes.
When he looked about him, he could not see the masked figure, and the little red bird had left his knees. He squinted, looking around him all around until he saw it. It was fluttering in the air nearby just a few feet away, Cam saw its colour and movements in the air.
He rose to his feet gingerly, turning to follow the bird which began to flit in the air back and forth. A few people paused to spare the thing a glance, but only briefly before moving on.
Cam headed to his new home, it was small and empty, but there was a bed and a kitchen and toilet facilities.
Cam stood in the doorway to the bedroom, just staring into the room which had nothing inside it but a bed. The door swung open slowly inwards.
Cam turned his head to the side towards the window, which had no curtains. The window was small, and the room a little dark, but outside Cam could see the sky beginning to grow darker.
He blinked slowly, for the longest time not moving, just standing there as if caught in a trance. He was too active in his mind, too afraid and in his mind, too disjointed to even think about sleep.
'What shall I do?' he mumbled to himself, standing alone in the silence.

The next day was a cool and dry one, the small town woke as it usually did, people beginning their routine.
It was midday, and Cam had still not moved from his bed.
A figure stepped in the room then, a figure clad in black
'You're not going to do this are you?'
'Do what?' Cam answered quickly in reply.
He was lying on his side with his back to the room, lying completely still, though he was wide awake.
The figure sat on the edge of the bed, leaning back and looking into Cam's face.
Cam glanced down towards the figure without moving or lifting his head. He squinted at the figure, his body jerked once, then he looked away again.
'You're slipping into depression' the figure told him. 'Don't just lie here, you'll feel worse.'
'What am I supposed to feel?' Cam answered flatly.
'Go outside and do something.'
'Fuck off.'
'That's not nice.'
'Where's Vergil?'
'You want to fuck him?'
'No' Cam said sullenly. 'I just want to talk to him.'
'He really does love you' the masked figure told him.
'Where is he? I want to talk to him.'

‘He…mmm’ the figure thought. ‘He wants you to return to your normal life’ he finished.
Cam began to chuckle then, his laugh weak.
‘I feel so sick’ he said. ‘I want to see him. No…I do want to talk to him but I want to fuck him too…. gods I want him so badly.’
‘If you really want that’ the masked figure, ‘then I’m sure it won’t be a problem. He is away on other business right now but he will be back later, tonight perhaps.’
‘I want to feel his body, his cock. I want it.’
‘Ha’ the masked figure laughed. ‘Ok.’
He rose from the bed then, grabbing Cam by the arm and pulling him up.
‘What are you doing?’ Cam groaned as the masked figure lifted him, carrying him over his shoulder across the room.
‘I’m taking you outside and you’re going to do something. Take a walk, read a book whatever, anything to keep you out of depression, and take your mind off *her*.’
The masked figure carried Cam down the stairs, taking him outside, carrying him with ease. He walked a short distance to the edge of the town, where the beautiful open land around could be seen.
The masked figure dumped him heavily on the ground, lifting his hand and summoning from thin are several books, and dumping them on the ground next to him.
‘There’ he said. ‘Now go take a walk.’
Cam glared sullenly at the ground beside him, where there were three books.
When he glanced up again, he saw the masked figure was gone.
Cam bowed his head, with a weary sigh he rose to his feet, bending down to pick up the books. He narrowed his eyes then, bringing the books close to his eyes, flicking through the pages.
He sneered in disgust, throwing the books aside and storming away.
The reason for his sudden anger and frustration was from the fact he could not see the pages. He could no longer read anymore, the thing he loved to do most.
Instead he walked, doing so quickly. He marched away, spending hours that day simply walking, resting after a long while by a stream. He sat back against the tree, tilting his head back towards the sky and closing his eyes. A masked figure passed him, and Cam opened his eyes.
‘Vergil?’
The masked figure shook its head, instead handed him a small bag, before moving off.
Cam watched the figure walk away, vanishing behind the trees.
Cam opened the bag, finding inside plenty of food and drink.

When it began to get dark, Cam returned home, going back to his room and closing the door.
He did not see Lucy that day.
Cam lay back on the bed, resting there in complete silence, wishing only for sleep, just to pass the time.
The door opened then, and Cam looked around, pushing himself up on the bed.
This time he knew who it was, he didn’t know how he knew before the figure removed his mask, he just knew.

‘There you are’ Cam said to Vergil.
Vergil raised his hand, taking the mask from his face, showing himself. He took his cloak and gloves off, revealing his normal clothes underneath.
‘Hey’ he said to Cam, sitting on the edge of his bed and facing him. ‘How are you doing?’
Cam didn’t answer, instead turned away in silence.
‘I wanted just to see you again’ he said after a time.
‘Yeah’ Vergil mumbled. ‘I know.’
He reached out to Cam, caressing his cheek.
Cam let out a sigh, closing his eyes.
Vergil leant forwards, kissing him.
Cam moaned in pleasure, leaning back on the bed and allowing Vergil to bear over him.
It felt so good for Cam just to kiss him, and he already began to get aroused.
Vergil leant back then, beginning to undress quickly as Cam on the bed did the same, taking his shirt off, the mechanics in his arms chinking quietly.
Cam was just unbuttoning his trousers when Vergil grabbed the top of them, helping him to pull them down.
Vergil lifted Cam’s legs, parting them so he could push himself in.
He thrust into Cam, moaning and gasping. He had his way with Cam, moving fast, thrusting hard, and all the while, Cam clung to him, groaning and whispering to Vergil that he wanted more, clawing at Vergil’s shoulders and leaving marks.
When Vergil had come, Cam pushed him off, rolling on top of him and whispering into his ear.
‘…. Vergil…I love you.’
Vergil kissed him in response, slipping his tongue deep inside him.
It became very hot very quickly in the small room, as Cam bored over Vergil, thrusting him hard, feeling him, deep inside, before collapsing on top of him, breathing heavily, his sweat mingled with Vergil’s.
‘That felt so good’ Vergil gasped.
Cam pushed himself up slightly, staring into Vergil’s face, before kissing him again.

The next morning, Cam woke to find Vergil still by his side. They were both naked under the sheets still, and as Cam watched him, he found himself thinking.
He looks so peaceful.
Cam decided to wake him.
‘Hey’ Vergil groaned in his tired state. ‘Morning, you ok?’
‘I want to have you again’ Cam said.
‘Again?’ Vergil laughed, hugging his pillow to him. ‘What’s gotten into you?’
‘Do you want to or not?’ Cam asked shortly.
Vergil lifted the sheets, revealing himself underneath.
‘You can always have me’ Vergil told him with a smile. ‘I would never say no to you.’
Cam moved on top of him then without a pause, spreading Vergil’s legs and pushing himself in.
Vergil let out a groan, throwing his head back and grasping Cam’s arms tightly.

Cam left the house shortly after that, followed a step behind by Vergil.
‘I don’t know what to do’ Cam mumbled to himself, slowing to a stop.
‘You could go visit your brother’ Vergil suggested, stopping beside him and glancing towards Cam.
Cam frowned, pursing his lips in thought.
‘I think….no…’ Cam said at last. ‘He would be repulsed by me.’
‘Don’t be silly’ Vergil said shortly.
‘Lucy is repulsed by me.’
Vergil turned away silently.
‘How can I go on?’ Cam mumbled. ‘I just want to die….’
He put his hands to his face then, covering his eyes.
Vergil watched him silently and calmly.
Cam took his hands away from his eyes then, staring at his hands, each different from the others.
Cam flexed his fingers, before allowing his hands to drop to his sides.
‘I…. uh….’ Cam raised his head, blinking slowly to the clouds. ‘This day…its sunny…the sun…’ he trailed off. ‘What must it be like’ he mumbled to himself, ‘to die…to not exist?’
Vergil beside him gave a sad sigh.
‘I don’t want to see you suffer’ Vergil told him. ‘I didn’t mean for all of this to happen.’
‘Yeah’ Cam mumbled. ‘A lot of people didn’t mean for a lot of things to happen. Oh’ he said then, suddenly realising. ‘I have a lot to fix in my own world now’ he said. ‘I’ve allowed a lot of bad things to happen. I’ve realised now everything that has happened to me, even the bad…has allowed me to become stronger, now I can fix the mistakes I have made in the past…. the bad things I have allowed to continue for so long… though for some it has come too late.’ He broke off then, falling silent. ‘So many people have died because of my actions, I’ve allowed the council to control me. Looking back now, I realise how incredibly weak I was.’ He was quiet for a few more moments. ‘So many people’ he mumbled, ‘have suffered so horribly…. because of me.’
Vergil said nothing but continued to watch him silently.
‘I now know the extent of my powers’ Cam laughed, stepping back and staring up at the sky with a smile, though he felt no happiness. ‘I can do so much’ he breathed, eyes wide. ‘I am almost like a god in the stories I’ve read. I can do all the things a god can do.’
‘You are’ Vergil began slowly, ‘definitely worthy of the title.’
Cam turned to face him then.
‘You would definitely do well as one of the eight’ Vergil told him, ‘as one of us.’
‘I would not want such a thing’ Cam answered quickly. ‘Auntie was one of the eight’ he said, and she was murdered by one of her own to make space for another. ‘I would not like to do something myself so awful, and besides’ he said, ‘I have no interest in your organisation.’
‘Well’ Vergil said turning away, ‘I don’t know if we can call ourselves an organisation, we are hardly organised, but…’ he breathed a heavy sigh. ‘You say you don’t want to do

anything awful like kill someone to take their place, well…to fix the problems you as king have allowed to happen…. a lot of people are going to have to die.'
A strange expression crossed Cam's face then, and he gritted his teeth, the skin around his eyes twitching.
'Oh….' He sobbed. 'No….'
'This has to be done Cam' Vergil told him seriously. 'You have to eliminate the council, but it doesn't end with them. There are so many more.'
'I will have to kill them' Cam realised.
'To cleanse this world' Vergil finished, speaking in a distant voice, 'and kill all the bad people.'
'That would make me the only bad man left' Cam mumbled, 'if I were to do such a thing.'
'You've killed before' Vergil said. 'It should be easy for you.'
'I don't enjoy taking lives' Cam spoke quietly. 'I think it is…. repugnant. I don't want to be like the monsters who treated me so horribly in my childhood.'
'Look how far you've come' Vergil told him.
Cam bowed his head, shoulders hunched.
'It will be hard at first' Vergil told him, putting his hand on his shoulder, 'but…you will learn to accept it. In time it will become easy, in time it won't even matter to you anymore.'
'That is what I'm afraid of' Cam whispered. 'I don't want to be a monster.' He narrowed his eyes. 'Perhaps it is already too late to change that though.'
Vergil watched him for a moment, before his eyes dropped.
'I probably shouldn't do this' Vergil said to him, 'it's probably very wrong of me, but I have something that could make you feel better, at least for a short while.'
Cam turned to Vergil then, eyes turned down to Vergil's open hand.
'It's a drug' Vergil said. 'It will make you feel better' he told him, 'at least for a short time. But I warn you, there are side effects.'
'I don't care' Cam breathed. 'I want it.'
'Hold on for a second' Vergil said. 'This is dangerous stuff. I should not be giving this to you.'
'Vergil please I'm begging you. I have never felt so low. Anything that can make me feel better' he said. 'Anything that can get me out of this pit. I need this.'
Vergil hesitated.
'Let's go somewhere quiet' Vergil whispered. 'Come on.'

They moved away from the town and towards the woods, walking until they were deep in the forest. Vergil sat upon the ground in a clearing, as Cam paused for a moment, holding back as he stared up at the canopy of the trees overhead.
'Are you coming?'
Cam turned back to Vergil who was kneeling a short distance away.
He stepped towards him, sitting on the ground before him. Vergil had already lit the pipe, burning the deep blue power.
'Are you ready?' Vergil breathed, speaking quietly.
Cam leant forward as Vergil brought the pipe to his mouth, and Cam put his lips around it, taking in a deep breath.

The effects were almost instantaneous. He blinked slowly, and his pupils suddenly grew large, enough to make his eyes appear black.
He slumped forwards, head hung. Vergil caught him as he fell, turning around and laying him on the grass.
Cam lay on his back, staring up at the sky above him. Vergil caressed his cheek, leaning forwards to kiss him again. Cam closed his eyes. He barely felt Vergil's touch. In his mind and his body, he was no longer there at all, and he felt liberated, euphoric. Happy.

Vergil sat with Cam for a long time, helping him to walk back home after that, his movements and footsteps sluggish, but he seemed happy.
When they got back to the empty home, Vergil lay Cam on the bed.
'How do you feel?' Vergil asked him.
'I feel really good' Cam smiled.
'Are you hungry?'
'I don't know' Cam mumbled. 'I…. can't tell.'
'You haven't eaten all day. Come on, sit up.'
Cam did so, tilting his head and blinking tiredly.
'I'll get us something to eat' Vergil said. 'I won't be gone long.'
They ate together, the food Vergil had brought. Cam ate slowly, everything in the world seemed different to him now.
'How do you feel?' Vergil asked him again after a time.
'I think it's wearing off' Cam mumbled.
Vergil bowed his head, tearing off a piece of bread and handing it to him.
'Can I have more of it?' Cam asked, referring to the drug.
'It's not good to have too much' Vergil mumbled.
Cam looked away.
'Listen' Vergil said. 'I can do something to help you, though its only small…. not much but….'
'Go on' Cam prompted. 'What is it?'
Vergil raised his head.
'Your eye, you were stabbed in the eye by that demon.'
Cam fell silent, looking away.
'How is your sight?' Vergil asked.
'I cannot see through this eye' Cam muttered, hand going to cover it for a moment as he blinked, 'not at all.'
'And the other one?'
'I can see' Cam breathed, 'but everything is cloudy, everything is in shadow.'
Vergil nodded mutely.
'I can help you' he said again. 'I can… remove your blind eye and replace it with another.'
'You can really do that?' Cam mumbled.

‘Yes’ Vergil replied. ‘It’s risky but…. since you cannot see through that eye at all, if it doesn’t work, you won’t be losing anything.’
‘I guess its worth a try then’ Cam said to him, covering his blind eye with a metallic hand. ‘I cannot see at all on this side, nothing.’
Vergil watched him closely.
‘When you wake up tomorrow’ he said to Cam, ‘it will be done.’
Cam lowered his hand then, blinking slowly.
‘Thank you’ he breathed.

They slept side by side that night, together in the small bed, and Cam found comfort in being beside Vergil, though there was an ache in his heart as he realised. They belonged to different worlds. There would come a time perhaps soon that Vergil would leave him again, as he had done before. Vergil did not belong here in Cam’s world, he belonged in his own, he belonged in Lacklustre Paradise, that strange place where nothing ever changed.

The next day the woke late again.
He leant forwards, staring at himself closely in the mirror. He raised his hand, touching near his new eye.
He had slept peacefully, whatever the eight had done to him, they had not disturbed him as he slept, and he felt no pain. He had a new eye now, the one that had been stabbed by the demon had been taken away and replaced with another eye. This one was blue, now his eyes mismatched, but Cam could see, a little better at least.
Cam was encouraged by Vergil to go outside.
‘Don’t let your depression get a hold of you and drown you. You have to stay above the surface.’
‘I’m trying’ Cam answered sullenly.
They walked for a short time together, eventually coming to a small bridge where the water from the mill ran slowly beneath.
‘I love the sound of water’ Vergil was saying, placing his hand on the stone surface of the bridge. The bridge was only small, just tall enough to stand up straight underneath it, and that is where they stood now, beneath the bridge and just out of sight. ‘Do you like water?’ Vergil asked Cam.
‘Its fine I suppose’ Cam answered.

‘There used to be a terrible rat problem in this town’ Vergil told Cam. ‘They were getting into the grain supply, there was a particularly good harvest, and the rats were thriving because of it.’
Cam listened silently without reaction, Vergil continued. ‘There were hundreds of them’ he said, ‘they were swarming over this town, people could not live their normal lives there were so many. The rats would get into the cribs of babies and attack them, they would hurt children and spoil all the food and spread disease. They were a menace.’
‘So, what was done?’ Cam asked half-heartedly, standing there with his arms folded.
‘Someone came to this town to help them’ Vergil replied. ‘A piper.’
‘Where have I heard this story before?’ Cam asked flatly.
‘He came to this town to help the people’ Vergil continued.
‘Did he play his flute?’ Cam asked. ‘Did he drown the rats in the river?’
‘Don’t be silly’ Vergil said. ‘Rats can swim. No’ he turned away. ‘He came to this town, claiming that the rats were his friends. People just thought him to be a madman, but then he began to sing the most beautiful melody.’ Vergil smiled. ‘The rats all came swarming to him, climbing up his clothes and sitting on his shoulder and hands and head. The man seemed so happy and greeted the rats like one would to a loved one. It’s as if they truly were his friends.’
‘What’s the point of this story?’ Cam asked in a flat voice.
‘Nothing specifically’ Vergil replied turning back to him with a smile. ‘There is so much in this world that even we don’t understand. That strange man, with those rats. He took them away, they followed him like a pack of loyal dogs, and he watched his footsteps carefully so as not to tread on any of them. And then he was gone, taking all of his rats with him.’
Cam bowed his head.
‘I don’t feel ready to return home yet’ he mumbled, ‘I mean…..to the palace.’
He let out a sigh, hand going to his face.
‘Gods my mind is such a mess.’
‘So, you’re going to stay here?’ Vergil spoke quietly.
‘I suppose I will’ Cam answered, ‘until I am ready to face my brother.’ He paused then, raising his head to Vergil. ‘I imagine you will be leaving.’
‘I will’ Vergil replied, ‘eventually, but not yet.’

Vergil stayed for only a short time after that, just a few days more, before he left Cam suddenly, and without warning.
The sting of the loss and so sudden was great, but Cam did not despair, he knew Vergil was still out there somewhere, watching over him, as he had been for so many years.
Cam entered what was now his home, it was still light outside, though the day was wearing on. It would begin to get dark soon, but Cam’s home at the edge of the town was still light enough inside for Cam to be able to see his way as he walked forwards. It was a small home, almost completely empty save for a kitchen downstairs, and upstairs, the bed on which Cam lay on.
Cam stood on the threshold of the doorway to the bedroom, lingering there for a moment. He turned his head slowly to the side, gazing towards the window to the world beyond.

Everything was still in the little town, and Cam had come to realise how peaceful it was, at least it had been in his time here.
He stepped forwards, closing the door behind him quietly and making his way towards the bed, sitting on the edge.
He found himself incredibly bored for most of the days, especially now without Vergil. There were often days where Cam felt frequent waves of despair washing over him, triggered by nothing in particular. They would just happen, and he would wonder at what moment in his life he had passed the point of no return, and not for the first time he wondered…
What would my brother think when he sees me?
Cam let out a heavy sigh, turning towards his bed, he suddenly noticed something he had not before.
Upon his bedside table was a little device. Cam stared at it for a moment, before reaching out to take it.
Bringing it closer to his face he saw that it was an electric device, something not from his own world but from a future world. There were some buttons on the front of the small device, and as Cam looked back to the bedside table, he saw a note upon it.
He let out a heavy sigh, frustrated with himself that he had not seen it before.
'For fucks sake…'
He took the paper and very slowly read it.

Hello my love. This is Vergil.

I know you love to read, but you struggle now because of your eyes. The device I have left for you is a little machine. You can use it to fulfil your desires. You can't read, but with this device you won't need to. It reads stories to you, they are called *'audio books'*. There are thousands on this device. It has a menu, it's easy to use, but if you struggle

with the menu, just talk to it, it has voice recognition. Just say the word 'menu' and go from there.

Cam blinked, looking back at the device he held in his other hand.
'Menu.'
Please select a genre. Fantasy. Romance. Slice of life…..
'Romance.'
Please choose title or select at random.
'Random.'

A Change of Heart – Prologue

Sam took Leroy by the hand, walking upstairs with him.

Sam opened the door for Leroy, closing it quietly once they were both inside. He leant back against the door, smiling at Leroy shyly.

Leroy watched him; reaching out to Sam and grasping him by the front of his shirt, pulling him towards him before turning, and pushing him slowly back onto the bed. He crawled forwards, leaning over him on all fours.

'Are you sure you want to do this?' Leroy asked him.

'Yes' Sam breathed. 'I want to…love you…to feel you…' he smiled. 'I want this' he whispered, 'I want to…feel you inside me.'

Sam reached up, brushing Leroy's cheek tenderly, running his fingers through his hair, before letting his hand fall back down to the bed, laying there beneath Leroy, calmly, simply waiting.

Leroy leant forwards, caressing Sam's cheeks with both hands as he moved forwards, his lips hovering over Sam's. He paused only briefly before kissing him.

Sam moaned as Leroy moved his tongue inside him, grasping Sam's arm with one hand, and with the other, slipping beneath his belt.

Sam broke away from him, craning his head back, his body shuddering, his breath in shallow gasps.

Leroy withdrew his hand, unbuckling Sam's belt, with the other hand he lifted Sam's shirt to expose his bare chest.

'You're so handsome' Leroy whispered, running his tongue across naked skin. 'So perfect.'

He leant back, sitting up so that he could see Sam's face clearly.

'Don't worry' he said. 'I won't mark you.'

'I wouldn't mind if you did' Sam mumbled back, cheeks flushed as Leroy continued to touch him down below, caressing him so tenderly. 'I am yours…' he breathed, 'after all…'

Leroy pulled his hand back, grasping the top of his trousers and pulling them down, freeing Sam from them and throwing them aside.

He leant over Sam again, kissing him briefly, before whispering into his ear.

'Turn over.'

Sam did so, and Leroy ran his hands over his body, nuzzling into his shoulder and smelling his scent as he unzipped his own trousers.

'Relax' he told him. 'I'll be gentle.'

Sam drew a sharp intake of breath, balling the sheets up in his hands as Leroy pushed forwards, reaching further into him as he leant over Sam, weaving his fingers between Sam's, as he moaned in pain, and in pleasure.

Leroy's body began to sweat in the hot room, but he did not slow his pace as he thrust into him.

Leroy continued, enjoying every inch of Sam's body, owning him. Controlling him.

He quickened as he began to climax, throwing his head back as his finished.

They lay on the bed together after that, holding each other close.

'I love you Leroy' Sam told him. 'I love you...'

Leroy squeezed him tighter, closing his eyes content as he felt a strange emotion inside at hearing these words.

'I know' Leroy whispered quietly to Sam.

A lot has changed throughout my life, and I haven't always been as happy as I am now.

I love Sam dearly, he is everything to me, and meeting him was one of the best things that has ever happened to me….

However…my story began not with him

but with another…

Cam lay back on the bed, becoming still. He listened to the audio book, the voice speaking clearly in a male voice, was soothing to him, and Cam had to force himself to stay awake at times. He felt tired, but didn't want to miss the story, and so stayed awake for hours.

The next day

Cam woke in reasonable time the next morning, though he was tired, he found that he could not sleep for long and so he left his bed. He spent so many hours these days just lying on it, it was an effort for him to go outside, but he forced himself to do so some days, for food if not for anything else.
Vergil had left him plenty of money. Cam didn't ask where it had come from, it hardly seemed to matter. There was more than enough for what he needed for a long time. He took a small amount from the draw in the kitchen, before heading outside.
It was still early in the morning, and the air had a sharp chill to it, despite this Cam wore only a thin shirt.
He stepped out of the home, pausing as he stood there for a moment, glancing first one way, then the other.
He made his way forwards.
Cam had walked this way before, he had done so with Vergil by his side. They have visited the town briefly together, this was the first time Cam had done this by himself. It was strange for him, but by now he knew where everything was.
'I would like some bread' he said to the baker.
The fresh scene of new bread was wafting through the air all around the bakery, and as Cam stood there waiting, the young man just stared back at him, lost for words.
'I'm sorry' another older man said hastily rushing up to both of them. 'What sort of bread would you like?'
Cam couldn't see as he turned slowly to face this second baker, but the man flinched as he turned his eyes towards him. One pale and milky, the other blue.
Cam squinted, frowning then as he tried to get his blue eye to focus.
'Anything' he said to the man. 'I don't care.'
He placed the coins upon the counter, glancing up again at the men.
Cam was given a loaf of bread, and left immediately after that, heading to another shop to buy butter.
As he went about his business, even Cam couldn't help but notice the people as they stared at him.
'Do I frighten you?' he asked the young lady in the shop, who seemed frozen to the spot in fear, her eyes like dinner plates.
He left the store immediately after buying what he needed. The people who worked in the shop, and the few early customers all stared at him as he walked out.
Most were terrified at the sight of him, and Cam couldn't blame them. He must have looked truly awful to them. And his arms, to people who had never known of those sorts of technologies that existed in other worlds, it must have been so strange.
Cam went back home, carrying with him the things had he bought, and ignoring the people who stared after him in fear. They stared at him, they stared at his arms and his skin which was scared, and they stared at his eyes, they stared at all of him. He was different, he was frightening.
Cam closed the door to his home, turning again and heading slowly towards the kitchen.

He put on the counter what he had bought, alongside the bread and butter he had also bought cold cooked chicken and some cheese and vegetables.
Cam let out a groan, bowing his head and blinking tiredly, yawing and stretching before looking back to the things he had laid out upon the counter.
He ate a little of what he bought before going back upstairs to the bed. He lay down and listened to another story, utterly exhausted. He fell asleep eventually, unable to keep himself awake any longer. He was so very tired.
After that, some hours later Cam woke again, turning to face outside. Through the window it was night-time and all was still. Cam could not hear the owl hoot in the night, the only thing he could hear was the never-ending ringing in his ears. To him all else was silent.
Since the explosion that had taken his other arm, this was all he could hear when it was quiet around him.
Cam left his home, walking through the town in the dead of night. He found a sort of peace here in his solitude, and it was beautiful.
It almost felt as he walked, that he was in another world again, everything seemed so different at night.
Cam paused, glancing up towards the sky. All he could see was the moon, a glowing golden lantern. Everything else around was dark.
Cam faced ahead again. His skin began to glow, lighting his way.
He was in full control of his own magic now, and he was stronger than he had ever been before. No one would be able to hurt him ever again. Never again.
As Cam made his way into the wilderness, several people within their homes who passed their windows by chance at that exact moment, saw Cam's glowing silhouette in the darkness.
They all thought the same thing, they thought, that an angel was walking the earth, but Cam was far from anything pure.

He returned to the town in the morning, feeling exhausted.
'I've got to get into a routine' he mumbled to himself, sitting back upon a bench before one of the homes, watching the people walking the streets, 'this pattern isn't good for me…'
He lowered his hand from his forehead, facing ahead again as he leant back on the bench. His metal hand thud hard on the wood beside him as he let it drop.
A few people stared at him as they went by, going about their business, and a small group of children stood across him from the street, watching him cautiously. He was a peculiarity to them, children and adults both.
After a time, Cam rose from his seat, going back to his home to get money for food.
He visited the shops as he did before, buying what he needed. The people this time were still uncertain around him, but not as fearful as they had been the day before.
'Its ok' one of the people in the shop whispered to another, 'he's just here to buy food, he's not going to hurt us.'
Cam of course, could not hear them, all he could hear was the constant ringing in his ears

The next day Cam visited the shops again, they were friendly even, though Cam did not see their smiles, he heard their voices were different now when they spoke to him. They were fearing him less.
The day after that, it got better again. It got to a point as he visited every day, that people even began to welcome him when he entered their shops.

It was days later, and Cam was lying back on the grass staring up at the sky.
The people were working in the fields before him, and he rested now on the lip of a small hill, overlooking the town and the farmland around.
He brought the pipe to his lips again, breathing deeply inwards the blue-purple smoke. Blinking slowly, his pupils were massive.
Someone approached him, it was a long time before Cam noticed, only doing so when a shadow fell across him.
Cam turned his head to side. He saw the silhouette of a young man, perhaps only about seventeen in age, though it was hard for Cam to tell. He could tell by his voice however that the figure was young.
'People are talking' the figure spoke bravely. 'They say there is an angel that walks the plains and farmland around this town at night, but I don't think its so.' He paused. 'I saw you' the boy continued. 'That is you isn't it, that glowing figure?'
Cam sat up, turning his head to regard the boy, putting the pipe to his lips again and taking a pull.
'Yeah' he grumbled. 'That's me.'
'You are no angel' the young man replied.
'No' Cam mumbled. 'Hardly.'
'It's like magic' the young man breathed. 'But, that cannot be. Magic does not exist, surely it must be some trick.' He paused. 'Tell me how you do it.'
Cam stared up at the boy, breathing from his pipe again, before blowing out the coloured smoke.
'It is no trick' Cam replied. 'It is real. Magic does exist.'
'Then show me.'
'I don't have to.'

The young man hesitated.
‘I want to see it’ the man pressed, he seemed to be very nervous, but eager at the same time.
Cam said nothing.
‘If you can really use magic’ the young man persisted, ‘maybe you can use it to help people in some way.’
‘Help people?’ Cam echoed, speaking quietly. ‘I used my magic to kill…. mainly.’
Cam raised his head, looking towards the young man then.
‘How could I help people?’ Cam asked the young man. ‘What could I do?’
‘I don’t know’ the young man replied. ‘There are so many ways people can help others.’
‘I would like to help people’ Cam mumbled, brow furrowed now. ‘I want to do good things. I…. I don’t know.’ He looked back at the young man then, speaking to him. ‘You’re not afraid of me, are you?’
‘I….’ the young man began. ‘Yes’ he finished. ‘A little.’
‘I guess…’ Cam said turning away again, ‘that is no surprise…’

It was the next day Cam woke early, feeling exhausted after listening to his audio books all night, he was exhausted, but happy, and excited.
‘How can I help?’ he asked one of the men working the field.
‘I’m sorry?’ the elderly gentleman asked, his voice wavered a little with nerves as he stared back at Cam.
‘I don’t want people to be afraid of me’ Cam replied. ‘I… I know I am strange to you. But I promise you have nothing to fear from me, not you. I wouldn’t hurt you. I…. I want to help.’
Cam paused then. ‘This might be hard to believe, but I used to be a farmer.’
‘You did?’
‘You know who I really am?’ Cam asked the man, ‘in this world?’ he turned away sharply then, laughing to himself. ‘No of course you wouldn’t, how could you?’
‘I don’t know what you mean.’
‘You probably won’t believe me’ Cam began, ‘but my name is Cameron. I am your king.’
The man stared at him, Cam could not see his expression, and he couldn’t tell what he might be thinking.
‘I would like to help this place’ Cam continued, ‘but…I am not sure how. I have used my magic only for killing and fighting, but I want to use it for more and better things.’
‘Magic?’ the old man breathed. ‘I have heard rumour of a glowing angel walking the lands. Was that you?’
‘Yes’ Cam replied, ‘but I am no angel.’
He looked away towards the horizon, before looking back at the man before him.
‘I um…...’ Cam began, ‘I want to…...’ his body convulsed suddenly, jerking sharply then. Cam gritted his teeth, hand going to his left ear and glaring. He waited for the sensation to pass, before lowering his arm again. ‘I want to help’ he told the man, continuing as if nothing had happened. The pain in his ear and the left side of his head was getting to him again, where the worm had been put in his ear, and his body was convulsing because of it, made worse by the drugs he was taking. ‘Please let me help.’

‘I don’t know how you could help us.’
Cam bowed his head.
‘What are you doing here?’ he asked the old man.
‘Here?’ the man looked away, ‘we are…. growing crops.’
‘I could help’ Cam persisted.
‘You want to help us work the fields? It’s been hard this year with little rain.’
Cam blinked slowly.
‘I can…’ he whispered, ‘I can help you grow your crops.’
The man watched him then as Cam turned away.
Cam knelt in the soil, gathering the earth in his hands and rising to his feet again. He brought the dirt to his chest, tilting his head down towards it as he stared closely at the soil.
From his hand sprung weeds, growing from nothing to large in a matter of seconds, the soil spilling over his hands as he held the plants. The man took a step back, gasping in shock and disbelief. From the weeds, the tips sprouted flowers, beautiful large flowers.
Cam dropped his hands, letting the plants fall to the ground.
‘I didn’t know I could do that’ Cam mumbled, staring down at the ground. ‘I can create’ Cam breathed, ignoring the man who stood behind him, stunned into silence, ‘…I can create as well as destroy.’
He took a step forwards, and as he did, flowers began to grow at his feet. Crops grew, rich and healthy, the grass grew tall, beautiful flowers blossomed.
Cam stopped moving, raising his head then towards the sky.
The man behind him fell to his knees, crying into his hands in disbelief at what Cam was doing.
The most beautiful flowers grew, unfurling from the ground, their flowers twisting as they grew and blossomed the most beautiful colours. But Cam’s magic created something new, something, that had not been seen before on this earth.
People began to gather as Cam’s magic spread about the town, beautiful flowers growing in the flower beds, in the flower pots beneath people’s windows, between the cracks in the streets. And the clouds over head growing dark, as rain began to gently fall.
People leant out their windows to see what was going on, turning their heads towards the field in which Cam stood. They began to gather here, drawn to him in fascination. The rain began to fall heavier now.
Cam summoned the rain out of nothing, the clouds growing and darkening in a matter of minutes.
Cam drew a slow breath, sighing deeply as he stared up at the clouds, the grey haze above him was all that he could see as the cool raindrops fell on his face.
He blinked slowly, not noticing the people beginning to gather at the edges of the field, staring around at awe at what was around them, the plants that had grown, the crops thriving in the field, growing in a matter of seconds.
It had taken Cam no effort at all.
The rain continued to fall, and it was cold, but it felt good.
‘I am a WeatherMaker’ Cam spoke to himself. ‘I am myself…’

Many more weeks passed, and it took the townspeople a long time to clear all the weeds and flowers from between the buildings and the street. But they didn't mind, they did it with joy.
On one of these days, Cam sat alone in the town, beside a clock tower, just a small thing, he rested in the shadow before it, lost in his own thoughts.
Lucy watched him for a long while, holding herself. She watched him, but she did not approach. She only watched from a distance, feeling sorrow in her heart, feeling regret, feeling emotions she could not put a label to.
She unfolded her arms, turned and walked away.
Cam did not see her, he had not seen her for several days, and would not see her for many more days.
They lived separate lives now.

A month later

'Morning Cam!' the baker said.
It was still very early, the sun had not even touched the horizon yet, but Cam was awake already.
'Hey Bill' Cam groaned.
'Up late again?' the baker replied, leaning forwards on the counter with a smile.
'Yeah I was' Cam replied. 'I'll probably have a nap later today.'
'I've never known anyone to love books so much' the man smiled.
'Well' Cam sighed, 'I just…. I've always like them.'
'Maybe you should read to the children' the baker suggested, 'might help them to stop being afraid of you.'
Cam paused then, before a slow smile spread across his face, a genuine smile.
'I don't blame them for being afraid of me' he said. 'I would be…. if I were them.'
'They'll come around' the baker smiled.
'I doesn't matter' Cam shook his head.
'It doesn't bother you that children are afraid of you?' the baker asked him.
'Why would it?'
The baker just smiled.
'How are the cows?' Cam asked him.
'Better than they were before' the baker replied. 'I don't know what it was but something was worrying them terribly, their milk was sour, it tasted awful.'
'Something must have been worrying them greatly' Cam mumbled, blinking slowly.
'Yes, but I have no idea what. Sometimes these things happen' the baker replied. 'Not much we can do about it, they are such skittish creatures.'
'They are.'
'They've not been well for a while now' the baker mused, scratching at his chin. 'But things have gotten much better lately.'
'I'm glad' Cam replied. 'How is your wife these days?'
'She's very well, same old really, her arthritis is still no better I'm afraid.'

‘Same old really’ Cam smiled, a slow gleam crossing his face.
‘Her foolish dog though, he keeps stealing her slippers and running downstairs with them, not bringing them back.’
‘You mean your collie Bracken?’
‘That’s the one’ the baker nodded.
‘That silly dog’ Cam answered flatly.
‘Silly dog indeed’ the baker shook his head. ‘No matter how many times I tell him off he never really listens.’
Cam chuckled lightly to himself.
‘That creature has so much energy.’
‘He sure does’ the baker nodded in agreement.
‘Just watching him makes me tired.’
‘You and me both’ the baker sighed. ‘Too much energy for me I’m afraid, I struggle to keep up with the dam animal. But my daughter isn’t around anymore to look after him, she’s the one who wanted him but…well…. you know….’
‘Yeah’ Cam nodded. ‘It’s not easy.’
‘There’s something I’ve been wondering’ the baker smiled, leaning forwards on the counter. ‘What is your job, and are you really the king?’
‘I don’t have a job, and yes I am really the king.’
The baker smiled at Cam. It was a question he asked Cam every single day, and every single day Cam always answered the same.
‘Then how do you make your money?’
‘I don’t’ Cam smiled to the baker. ‘Money just comes to me.’
‘Hahaha’ the baker laughed. ‘Wouldn’t that be nice?’
Cam took his bread from the counter, tucking it beneath his arm and turning away.
‘Until next time’ Cam spoke quietly back to him.
‘See you tomorrow morning’ the baker waved at him.

Cam returned home to eat his breakfast. The bread he had bought was fresh and delicious, and he ate it slowly, sitting at the bottom of the stairs in his home.
After that, he went back outside.
Cam did as he always did when he wasn’t listening to audio books. He sat outside and smoked from his pipe, breathing in the deep purple smoke, blinking slowly. He was in a world of his own.
He didn’t see Lucy approach him. He only noticed her when she spoke to him.
‘…...Cam?’
Cam furrowed his brow, lowering his pipe.
He turned to the side, seeing a head of orange hair.
Cam placed the pipe upon his lap, straightening then.
‘Lucy.’
Cam could not see her expression.
‘Hey Cam’ she mumbled. She sounded sad.
‘Oh….um…… what do you want?’ he asked her awkwardly.
She looked ahead again, placing her hands together before her, fingers laced.

‘I just wanted to see you’ she spoke quietly to him. ‘I…. I worry about you.’
‘But why? We are not affiliated with each other anymore.’
Lucy clenched her fists, hunching her shoulders. She drew a steady breath, turning to face him again.
‘I can’t explain how I feel’ she said to him, ‘I don’t even know where to begin. I missed you….. *so dearly*..... I grieved for you. I thought…. that…’ she broke off then.
Cam stared ahead of him, he heard in her voice, heard that she was in pain.
I’m sorry Lucy. I cannot help you.
‘I’m sorry’ Lucy whispered, ‘I don’t understand what happened, I don’t know what happened to you, I….. I don’t understand…’
‘You are upset.’
‘Of course I’m upset’ she whispered. ‘Look at what’s become of you.’
Cam could hardly register what she was saying, the drugs…. they were already having a profound effect on him. His mind was in a dream, a fluffy haze descended over him. His eyelids fluttered closed, before opening again, his pupils were massive.
He didn’t notice Lucy leave, he couldn’t even remember how long they had been talking for, all he could remember, was this blissful feeling of euphoria.

It was many weeks later when Lucy approached Cam again.
This time Cam was not smoking, though his body continued to twitch occasionally. Because of the drug, because of the damage on his brain caused by the worm, because of another unknown reason.
‘How long have I been here?’ Cam asked himself. ‘I don’t even remember….’
‘Cam?’ Lucy voiced. ‘I’m here.’
Cam turned towards Lucy, squinting at her.
‘Lucy’ he said. ‘It’s you.’
‘Cam’ Lucy spoke quietly, dipping her head to the man standing by her side, Cam sat before them on the bench. ‘This is William.’
‘William’ Cam mumbled, blinking slowly. ‘I…. I suppose I should say *it’s nice to meet you*.’
‘William’ Lucy spoke quietly to him, holding onto his arm. ‘This…this is the Cam I told you about.’
William looked at Lucy hard for a moment, before turning towards Cam.
‘Is it all true?’ he asked. ‘Are you really our king? Have you really travelled to other worlds?’
‘Yeah’ Cam sighed, sounding tired. ‘Sounds amazing doesn’t it?’ he said flatly. ‘It isn’t. Everything that has happened to me…. has caused me to become what I am today.’ He smiled humourlessly then, opening his arms out wide and showing his broken teeth. ‘Do you like what you see?’ he asked sarcastically, before lowering his arms and rising to his feet. He walked away.
‘If you’re really our king’ William called out to him, ‘why have you done the things you have?!’
Cam stopped and turned back, squinting at William and cocking his head.

‘I never meant for anything bad to happen’ Cam told him, speaking in a clear voice. ‘But don’t worry’ he spoke quietly now, ‘I will put things right, eventually. You have my word.’
‘Lucy tells me you can use magic’ William spoke up. ‘I do not believe in magic.’
Cam blinked slowly. He raised one of his arms, slowly, holding it in the air. ‘You couldn’t even begin to imagine what I have seen. I don’t need to prove anything to you. You will see in time what I can do.’
He strode away quickly without another word, William and Lucy staring after him, Lucy holding onto William’s arm.

Many more weeks later, and Cam was lying down upon the grass just outside the town, the tree overhead shading him, and in the field before him the people worked. And Cam whiled away the hours simply resting and smoking.
But the children of the town were watching him, and day by day they were becoming bolder, getting closer and close to him, daring each other to approach him.
On one of these days, one of the children was brave enough to steal his pipe as it rested on the grass beside him.
Cam rose swiftly, causing the children to scatter, but he saw the child that stole his pipe, and followed him back into the town.
Cam cornered the child between a stall and the building behind. He just stood there, standing over the small boy who held the stolen pipe to his chest.
‘I’m sorry’ the boy pleaded, ‘please let me go.’
Cam did nothing, he said nothing. He just stood there silently standing over the child, staring down at him with tired eyes.
The child was scared. He began to cry.
His wails were heard across the street, and people were turning towards them, some began to approach slowly to see what was going on, though Cam did not notice this.
He bowed his head, blinking slowly.
Cam knelt before the child, keeping a short distance from him, coming to his level.
‘I know I must frighten you’ Cam told the boy calmly, ‘but I promise you, you have nothing to fear from me. I will not hurt you.’
The boy fell silent, staring back at Cam, his eyes, one pale and milky and the other blue.
‘Give me my pipe back’ Cam told the boy, speaking in a calm voice. ‘It’s bad for you.’
The boy stared back at him for a few moments, holding the pipe to his chest still.
‘Give it back’ Cam mumbled.
The boy hesitated, looking down then.
He raised his head, looking back at Cam as he considered.
The boy reached out to him, holding pipe in a hand and offering it to him.
Cam raised his metallic hand, taking the pipe back from the boy carefully.
‘Thank you’ he breathed, putting the pipe away in his pocket.
Cam rose to his feet, turning to walk away.
‘Cam…’
He turned then, seeing Lucy standing there. He had not noticed her.
‘Lucy’ he mumbled, ‘what are you doing here?’

Lucy approached him, walking slowly.
‘I’m worried about you.’
Cam began to laugh, chuckling quietly to himself, though he didn’t tell her what he found so funny.
He twitched suddenly, his body jerked to the side.
Cam raised his hand, pressing it to the left side of his head for a moment and holding it there, before lowering it again, letting out a heavy sigh.
‘What’s happened to you?’ Lucy asked him sadly. ‘Why do you do that?’
‘I think the drug is making it worse’ Cam mumbled, speaking to himself. He hardly heard what Lucy had said to him.
‘Why do you smoke that?’ Lucy asked him.
‘To ease the pain.’ Cam exhaled slowly.
‘Are you in pain?’
Cam lowered his eyes.
‘I am always in pain’ he mumbled. ‘I always have been. From the day my father died…’
Lucy let out a sigh, turning away.
‘You’re upset.’
‘Seeing you this way’ Lucy mumbled, ‘it…...it breaks my heart.’
Cam looked away, tilting head back towards the clouds.
‘What does it feel like?’ Lucy asked her, ‘to have gained the knowledge that you have?’
‘I would rather be without it’ Cam uttered. ‘I…more than anything I wished for a normal life, for me and my brother. My life has been so painful to live, so painful to endure. I never wanted to be a prince. I never wanted to be a king.’
Lucy approached him then, taking one of his hands in her own.
Cam glanced back at her, brow furrowed in uncertainty as Lucy took a closer look at Cam’s arm, running her fingers along the metal.
‘So strange’ she mumbled. ‘It’s so strange.’
She looked back up at him.
‘What does it feel like’ she asked him, ‘to have these?’
‘I miss being able to touch’ he spoke quietly in reply. ‘I miss being able to feel.’
Lucy let go of him, stepping back.
‘I never thought I’d see you again’ Lucy mumbled.
Cam said nothing, but simply stared back at her, with his strange eyes, blinking slowly.
He couldn’t see any of her features clearly, but he saw her hair, her beautiful hair, that was orange like the setting sun.

‘Why do you smoke that?’
It was many more days later when the boy who had stolen his pipe approached him. Cam saw the boy standing there before him.
‘Because it makes me feel good’ Cam answered shortly.
‘But I thought it was bad for you.’
‘It is.’
‘Then why do you take it?’
‘Because I don’t care about myself.’
‘I don’t understand.’
Cam sighed, taking a step closer.
‘It’s difficult for me to try to explain this to a child…’
‘I’m not a child’ the boy answered sulkily.
‘Yes, you are’ Cam answered. ‘Don’t pretend to be something you’re not, you’re not fooling anyone.’
Cam paused for a moment, waiting for the child to speak, when he didn’t, Cam simply walked away.
‘What happened to your arms?!’ the boy called after him.
Cam paused, blinking at the boy. His body jerked then, and his raised his hand unconsciously, scratching at the left side of his head.
‘Why do you twitch like that?’ the boy asked. ‘Is there something wrong with you?’
Cam let out a sigh. He felt so very tired.
‘There are some things I just cannot explain to you, some things that you would not believe. So, I’ll just tell you the truth straight. I travelled to another world, to several, more advanced than our own. My arms were ripped from by body, it was very painful. I was given these false arms instead.’
‘Hold on a minute’ the boy said hastily as Cam made again to leave.
‘What do you want?’ Cam said to the boy. ‘Why are you bothering me? I suppose at least its good you’re not afraid of me anymore.’
‘I think you’re really interesting.’
Cam blinked back at the boy, before laughing to himself, turning back to face him.
‘Do you now?’ Cam groaned.
‘I’ve never seen anyone like you before.’
‘I bet you haven’t’ Cam answered flatly. ‘There is no one else like me.’
‘Is it true that you can use magic?’ the boy asked.
‘Have you not see me use magic before?’ Cam said to the boy. ‘I’ve done it in front of people before.’
‘Yeah but it might be a trick’ the boy replied. ‘My father always told me magic was a thing that was made up in story books.’
‘He’s right of a sort. In this world it should not exist. I am the only one in this world who can use it.’
‘Why? Why are you so special?’
‘Special is a term that has little meaning to me’ Cam told the boy flatly. ‘I don’t know why I’m this way. Sometimes things are just the way they are.’
‘That’s not an answer.’

‘In that case I don’t have one’ Cam mumbled, putting his hands in his pockets.
He stared back at the boy mutely as the boy continued to watch him.
‘Can I see your arms?’ the boy asked bravely, his voice raised in hope as he stepped forwards.
Cam stared at the boy, not moving for a moment. Then he bowed his head, looking down at himself.
He took his hands out of his pockets, showing the boy his metallic hands, each mismatched from the other.
The boy approached tentatively, closing the distance between them.
The boy hesitated, glancing up at Cam, who stood there with his arms out towards the boy, his mechanical hands limp as he waited for the boy.
The boy looked down at his metallic arms again, reaching out to touch both of Cam’s hand’s, taking them in his own. He touched them both at once, then one hand, then the other, his fingers running up the metal arm, seeing the workings of the machine between the cracks in the metal.
‘What does it feel like?’ the boy asked him.
‘I don’t feel anything’ Cam replied. ‘That’s what bothers me most of all. I miss feeling, I miss being able to touch. I can’t feel anything at all.’

Many more days passed, and Cam continued his non-routine of sleeping when he felt like it, smoking the drug who was having a more profound effect on him with every passing day. And when he wasn’t smoking, he was listening to his audio books. But he saw no sign of the masked figures, not for a long time, not since Vergil had left him.
It was growing late in the day when the baker approached Cam, smiling as he did so.
‘We’re having a festival tonight’ the baker smiled. ‘Will you be joining us?’
‘What sort of festival?’ Cam asked.
‘Just a celebration. We hold it in this town once a year, just for fun. Because who needs a reason to celebrate?’
‘I guess you’re right’ Cam smiled. ‘It’s good to have some fun every once in a while.’
‘The celebration will begin gradually’ the baker said, glancing all about him, ‘and as night begins to fall’ he breathed with excitement, ‘that is when the fun truly begins.’
‘Will everyone be celebrating?’ Cam asked the man.
‘Almost everyone’ the man smiled back at him. ‘Almost always everyone. People love it, in this town we hold the same celebration every year. Just for fun. We laugh and drink and be merry. I think you will like it’ he told Cam. ‘Won’t you join us?’
‘Sure’ Cam nodded. ‘Why not?’ Cam smiled. ‘It might be fun.’

Cam sat at the edges of the town, watching from the side lines as the people began to gather in the streets. They brought out from their homes great lanterns, hanging on the ends of sticks, swinging by thin silver chains.
Cam rose from where he sat, striding forwards into the centre of the town, where all around him people were beginning to crowd the streets. Children ran around and played. It was late, but on this night, the children were allowed to stay awake and play, some of the young ones

were being given drinks by their parents. The amount they were drinking of course was closely monitored.
As Cam moved forwards, he looked about him. The town now was a hive of activity. Nearly everyone was awake, and people were dancing in the streets.
There was music, and food and the people laughed and smiled and were happy.
Cam walked through the crowd, slowing to a stop as he glanced about him.
He saw then Lucy a short distance away from him with William by her side. She paused, smiling at Cam briefly before moving on.
Cam's brow furrowed, and he smiled back at her weakly.
Lucy dipped her head to him before moving on.
A figure appeared beside him then, a female figure. Cam turned towards this figure, squinting at them. The female took his hand in her own, slipping her other hand around his waist.
'Hey Cam' the female smiled.
Cam tilted his head, narrowing his eyes.
'I know you' he mumbled.
'Yes?' the female figure smiled teasingly.
'You're one of the eight' Cam mumbled in a flat voice.
'Yes' the woman gleamed.
'You look too perfect' Cam told her as she moved back with him, pulling him gently towards the crowd.
The female figure began to chuckle, dancing with him.
'And what is your name?' Cam asked her, moving with her amongst the others that danced around them.
'My name is Wonderland' the female figure replied. 'I am a fairy. We've met before.'
'Have we?'
'You don't remember?' she smiled. 'I was the one who took you away from your world in the first place. I met you and your brother both on that ferry. You were heading across the river to find Lucy after…after the manor was destroyed.'
'Oh' Cam mumbled, 'yes I remember now, though I don't remember your face.'
'Are your eyes really that bad?'
They slowed to a stop. Cam let go of her.
'I can only just about see through my white eye' Cam said to her quietly. 'The other……everything is always out of focus.…and my hearing…since the explosion…all I can hear is constant ringing.'
'It must have been really hard' Wonderland smiled to him.
'Is that a question? Or are you just…being unhelpful.
'I can hide my wings by the way' she said to him, completely changing the subject. 'I have the most beautiful wings.'
'Why are you here?' Cam asked her. 'Is there something you want? Do you know anything about my brother?'
'Your brother is fine' Wonderland smiled. 'I know how much the two of you care for each other.'
Cam swallowed the lump in his throat. They stood there before each other, still as the other couples continued to dance all around them.

‘He is the one person’ Cam began, ‘that means the most to me in this world.’
‘You’re forgetting another.’
‘Another?’
‘It doesn’t matter’ Wonderland said turning away.
‘Is Luke safe?’ Cam asked Wonderland. ‘Please tell me he is safe.’
‘He is absolutely fine’ Wonderland replied straightening again and smiling at him sweetly. ‘We’ve been keeping him under close watch and protecting him from the council. He has come to no harm.’
‘And of course, I have your word on that’ Cam said to her flatly.
‘Cam’ Wonderland smiled. ‘We do some bad things but we are not liars.’
‘I liar could say the same thing’ Cam replied flatly.
‘You know…’ Wonderland continued, ‘you can’t stay here forever.’
‘I know’ Cam mumbled. ‘I know that one day soon I will have to return to the palace.’
‘You will become king again’ Wonderland gleamed excitedly. ‘You will be the most magnificent king to ever rule in this world.’ She smiled, grinning widely in an almost predatory way.
‘Do you really think so?’ Cam asked in a flat voice. ‘I am a monster.’
‘Look at what you’ve become!’ Wonderland breathed clapping her hands joyfully. ‘You are…. magnificent!’

After that, several hours later into the night, the music and dancing began to wind down.
The children began to gather around the clocktower in the centre of the town square as the adults stood at the edges of the square looking inwards.
‘Here’ the old baker said handing a book to Cam who stood in the centre of the town square, surrounded by the children.
Cam looked down at the book.
‘I don’t need a book to recite a story’ he told the baker, sitting back upon the stone bench against the clock tower. ‘I can read the story from my mind, and besides…’ he smiled at the baker sadly. ‘I cannot see the words clearly, especially in this dark.’
The baker smiled, taking the book back.
‘I understand’ he said, ‘what story will you be reading?’
Cam looked away, turning his head down towards the children as he thought.
The children all gazed up at him eagerly with wide eyes, they ranged in age from about two to just over ten years old.
Cam opened his mouth to speak to them.
‘What sort of story would you like to hear?’ he asked the children.
‘Something scary!’ one of them called out.
‘Something exciting!’
‘An adventure story about heroes!’
Cam couldn’t help but smile at the children as they excitedly jostled around him, each calling out for a different type of story.
‘You want an adventure story?’ Cam asked the children.
Several of them began to cry out and cheer, clapping excitedly.
Cam’s smiled widened further.

‘There are so many stories I could tell you’ he breathed, speaking in a quiet voice, though they all heard him now. It was a silent night, and the town was utterly still.
‘Once upon a time’ Cam breathed, ‘in another world, one like this but different…...there was a frost giant…. who lived alone.’ Several of the children jostled closer, leaning forwards eagerly towards him.
Is this what it’s like to live a normal life? Cam thought to himself as the children watched him closely. *Is this what it feels like not to be feared?*

Cam began to struggle, fighting violently against his bonds again as the torturer continued, his efforts against his binds in vain as the scarred man ripped from him another nail. Desmond held the gag over his mouth forcefully, muffling Cam’s screams.
‘That’s the last one on that foot’ the scarred man said. ‘I've run out of nails. Let’s move onto the next foot.’
Cam felt anger suddenly streak through him as he let out a snarl, glaring and gritting his teeth at the man kneeling before him as he was consumed by a raw and primal rage. He held his breath, bowing his head and concentrating.
The scarred man stopped suddenly, drawing back for a moment.
‘What was that?’
‘I felt it too’ Desmond said behind Cam.
‘That was strange’ the scarred man said rising to his feet. ‘It felt like the air was heavy all of a sudden…buzzing….I felt vibrations humming in my ears…’
‘You're doing this’ Desmond said accusingly to Cam, releasing his grasp and walking around the chair to stand before him. ‘Aren’t you?’
Cam, all fear and helplessness suddenly gone from him, tried to lunge forwards, clawing the arms of the chair, not in pain this time, but in fury. He snarled like a demon behind his gag, throwing his head this way and that, trying to free himself from it, until he succeeded.
Finally free to speak, he roared in pure rage, hate and loathing filling his heart and soul.
‘I'M GOING TO FUCKING KILL YOU!’

Those memories Cam thought to himself, *they are distant now. They mean nothing to me anymore, and never……will anyone be able to hurt me like that again.*
Never again……
……. I am stronger now……..

It was well past midnight by the time the parents left, taking their children with them back home to put them to bed, and even later when the others went to bed. The celebration slowly died down until everyone was gone, now only Cam remained, sitting where he had been in the town square, upon the bench before the clocktower.
He leant back against the smooth stone surface of the structure behind him, sighing in contentment.

After a time, he rose, walking out of the town and heading across the open plains, moving through the complete darkness. He used the magic from his own glowing body to light the way.

The next morning, when Cam sat alone in the street upon a bench, feeling extremely tired, Lucy approached him.
'It's not as peaceful here as you might think' Lucy began. 'It might seem like everything is normal here now, but this place is ravaged by war.'
Cam raised his head at that, blinking slowly.
'Is it?' he answered quietly. 'I didn't realise.'
'My….um…...' Lucy paused. 'I came here to be with William, to support him and be by his side. Maybe it was wrong of me because it was so dangerous.'
Cam said nothing but continued to listen silently.
'I still have some family alive' Lucy continued, 'those that are close to me, but they are far away and safe where there is no conflict. I came here to be with William, even if I risk my life. After all I could be killed. But… I truly love him, and want to be with him no matter what'
'It's really that dangerous?' Cam mumbled.
'Yes' Lucy replied. 'This town has been attacked before. 'They want this territory, the council….' She trailed off.
A slow smile spread across Cam's face then, but there was no amusement behind it.
'I have caused so much bad to happen; your family were probably killed because of me…. thought you should know' he added flatly.
Lucy said nothing but continued to watch him calmly.
'So many of my actions have had repercussions, things have happened I never thought would. Because I allowed them to happen. Because, I was too weak to stand up for myself.'
'That wasn't your fault' Lucy whispered. 'You were abused.
'I…...' Cam blinked slowly. 'I wonder sometimes how different things would be if I had died a long time ago. There were many times I nearly lost my life when I was younger, I think sometimes that I should have just let it happen. I should have allowed Brioke to kill me, I should have allowed myself to be killed by the soldiers that pursued me when I was living in the streets in part of the guild. I should have jumped off the tower, I should have…. I should have died.'
'Cam…'
'Life has been horrible. Is it supposed to be this way?'
'Cam please…' Lucy whispered.
Cam turned back to face Lucy.

‘Would death be all that bad?’ he asked her. ‘To simply not exist…. I think it would be better than what I have now.’
‘Please don’t talk like that.’
‘I know’ Cam mumbled. ‘There are things I have to fix before I die.’
‘There are reasons to keep on living’ Lucy urged him.
‘No’ Cam sighed wearily. ‘I think…. I will fix the wrong I have done in this world, and then more than anything…. I just want to die.’
‘Cam please…’
‘You know how I lost my arms?’ Cam spoke abruptly, changing the subject as he raised his hands before him, staring at the metallic fingers. ‘The first arm, my left arm’ he said turning to it and opening and closing his hand before his face. ‘I was found by a creature called ‘Beloved’, she was a monster, who enjoyed killing, enjoyed blood and torture. She played with me like a cat playing with a mouse, I felt so much pain you couldn’t possibly imagine. She ripped my arm from me, I remember seeing her clearly, and the pain I felt, I remember that too. I was given a mechanical arm to replace the one I had lost and….a few months later, certain things happened.’ Cam paused then, lowering his hand and looking around to stare at Lucy. ‘Beloved and I became very close friends, despite what she did to me. I loved her, I came to love her. I trusted her with my life. I own her so much despite…’ he broke off momentarily, swallowing the lump in his throat. ‘She was the one who helped me control my powers and release them…control them. It’s because of her, that I am what I am today. You have no idea what I am capable of. I could tell you that I could slaughter an entire army of men without breaking a sweat and you probably wouldn’t believe me. But it is true.’
Lucy watched him passively. She didn’t say anything.
‘This other hand’ Cam continued, raising his right arm, ‘this arm…the reason it’s different…the reason they don’t match is because it was given to me by another organisation. There was a bomb, a great explosion. I was standing too close. The bomb went off. I was partially blinded, I cannot see clearly anymore. I…my ears….in the explosion…...I can no longer hear clearly, there is a ringing…and a….’ his body convulsed then, twitching sharply, his body tense suddenly before relaxing. Cam gritted his teeth, bringing his hand to his left ear and clapping the metallic fingers over it, teeth gritted and glaring.
I still feel it inside my head….
Cam lowered his hand, leaning forwards, resting his elbows on his knees.
‘I will show you that what I say is true’ Cam spoke in a dead voice. ‘I will…. protect this town, and eliminate any threat, and I will do it with ease.’ He straightened then, facing away.
‘You really have no idea’ he mumbled, ‘how easy it is to kill. For me, its….*so easy*.’

It was many more weeks after that, Cam lay back on his bed, the room filled with smoke, his body twitching and jerking from time to time.
The drugs made him feel good, but they made his twitching worse, and the pain in his head…he felt the constant throb. Even though the worm had been taken out so long ago, he felt sometimes like it was still in there, and sometimes he would scratch at his scalp on the left side so hard that it would bleed.

He didn't hear Lucy burst into his room, but he heard her scream his name, however his reactions were slow.
She leant over him, grabbing him by the shoulders and shaking him violently.
'Cam!'
He shook his head to clear it, gritting his teeth as his mind throbbed.
'……What….?'
Lucy grabbed him by the arm, pulling him up into a sitting position.
'Cam the town is being attacked! They're killing people!'
Cam was vaguely aware of bells ringing outside, but they sounded like they were underwater.
'Cam!'
'I'm here' Cam mumbled. 'I hear….'
'Cam please do something' Lucy begged him falling to her knees before him. 'William is out there!'
'He's a soldier, isn't he?' Cam mumbled.
'*They're going to kill everyone*' Lucy screamed. 'They attacked before but now there are more!'
Cam swung his legs over the edge of the bed, hand going to his head on the left side as he sat there, for only a few moments, before forcing himself to rise.
'Please don't worry' he said to Lucy, 'everything will be alright' he told her, marching across the room and towards the stairs. To him the world seemed to tilt as he went, but he forced himself to keep on moving.

Cam stepped outside his home, glancing all around him.
Inside his home he had not heard the sounds, but outside now, he could hear the all too familiar cries of terror, screaming and the sounds of horses charging.
Cam turned his head, eyes wide as he saw a man on horseback charging towards him, he could hardly see the man, but he saw there was a weapon in his hand, a sword that was raised, the sunlight glinting on the blade's edge.
The man was dead before he passed Cam, the horse continuing on as blood seeped down its body, but not from the horse.
The head of the man that had charged him rolled at his feet. Lucy who stood in the doorway to Cam's home gasped then, stumbling back against the doorframe in horror at what she saw.
Cam gritted his teeth, hands going to his head as he struggled to concentrate.
It was difficult to see what was going on around him, his eyes failed him, the drugs clouding his mind, but he could sense the people around him, he could sense them through his magic, and they were easy to distinguish. They were incredibly easy to tell apart, the townsfolk, and the soldiers that were attacking. Cam could feel them because of their emotions. The fear stood out, and these were the ones that Cam spared.
People began to die. No one saw what was happening, no one saw what was coming.
Cam stormed forwards, standing out in the open as he continued to work his magic with the utmost precision.
He was calm now, tilting his head again as the soldiers began to die all around him.

After only a few minutes, he let out a sigh.
'It is over' he spoke, turning his head back to Lucy who still stood in the doorway of his home behind him. 'The soldiers…. Those that had intentions to harm the people in this town…..they are dead…'
'What?' Lucy gasped, not truly processing what he was saying. 'What are you saying?'
'Everything is safe now' Cam told her. 'William is on the edge of the town…. On the west side.'
Lucy hesitated then, before turning and running away, heading in the direction Cam told her William was.
Cam looked ahead again, bowing his head and letting out a sigh. His hand went to his head then, holding himself there for a moment, eyes closed and he breathed slowly.
Cam lowered his hand, raising his head again and opening his eyes. His pupils were large.
He stood there, simply staring ahead of him, blinking slowly and breathing calmly.
Everything was still around him, and he could hear nothing but the ringing in his ears.
Very few people within the town had been killed by the soldiers, only one or two, several more were injured but they were alive.
Cam just stood there for the longest time, doing nothing, just listening, and experiencing all he could around him, the breeze, the chill in the air, the strange sort of serenity that he experienced.
It was all so surreal.

'Did you do this?' one of the men hollered at Cam as he approached, walking slowly towards the crowd. 'All the people are dead' the man said, his voice breaking as the crowd around him turned to face Cam.
Cam approached the man speaking, slowing to a stop before him.
'What did you do?' the man demanded. 'What did you do?'
'I protected this town' Cam told the man calmly, 'and I would do it again.'
He paused falling silent, glancing about him at the people around.
'Are you afraid of me?' he asked the people. 'I did what I did to protect you' he told them, 'and I would do it again.'
The people stared at him, everything was utterly still.
'Did you really kill all these people?' one of the men asked stepping forwards tentatively.
'It's true!' Lucy called out. 'I saw it with my own eyes.'
Cam turned towards the voice, seeing Lucy's orange hair. Beside her stood another figure Cam assumed was William.
'You are serious, aren't you?' she said to Cam.
He didn't answer, but simply watched Lucy calmly.
'I'm glad' he said to her, but he did not elaborate or make clear what he meant.
'We shouldn't be afraid of him' Lucy told the other people listening. 'He has lived peacefully amongst us for so long, *please'* she called out, 'I'm begging all of you, do not fear him because he is different. Cam' she spoke to him now, 'tell them, tell them who you really are!'
Cam gritted his teeth, turning his head away for a moment, before looking ahead again, lifting his head.

‘My name is Cameron!’ he called loudly. ‘I am your king. Luke is my brother, the prince. I have been missing for years, but it is me, and it is true I have travelled to other worlds, it is true that magic exists!’
Cam raised his hands then before him, flexing his fingers. Looking down at his metallic limps before lifting his head again to the people around him. ‘I have been through hell and back!’ He cried. ‘I have…...’ he spoke in a quiet voice, ‘I have….’ He let out a sigh, bowing his head again and speaking to the floor. ‘All the suffering you have endured over these last ten plus years has been entirely my fault’ he spoke to the people. ‘I allowed the council to control me because I was too weak to stand up against them, but no more!’ he said lifting his head again. ‘I will use what I have learned…I will use the powers I have learned to control, my powers….to make things right again. I will make this world a better place, as it should have been, I will make this world the world my father worked so hard to try to make better. But I will succeed. If you are good people then you have no need to fear me…. I will not harm those that are true. But those who are evil, I will…. I will destroy them. I will make this world pure again, leaving behind only the good. All those that benefit from the suffering of others, all those that are cruel, they will die. I will make it so.’

Interlude start

The masked figure walked forwards slowly through the town, completely invisible to all those around, he used magic to conceal himself, not even Cam would be able to see him now.
He walked slowly through the town, moving in complete silence. Everything to him seemed like a dream.
He walked through walls, like a ghost, crossing the small courtyard at the back of the home in which Lucy stayed.
He saw Lucy there, sitting on a bench and leaning forwards with her elbows on her knees, head in her hands.
She was crying.
The masked figure lingered here for a moment, completely unseen, watching her for a moment.
The figure moved on, slipping through the very wall itself, after a moment finding Cam.

The figure watched him for the longest time. He did not interrupt Cam, but stood there continuing to watch, simply this, and nothing more.
Cam lay on his back in the grass, staring up at the clouds above, deep blue smoke all around him as he continued to breath in the drug smoked from the pipe. He did this often nowadays.

Interlude end

Several weeks later, Cam was sitting upon the roof of one of the buildings, simply thinking.
He had sat here for hours. In recent days he had spent his time simply thinking, even smoking a little less to clear his mind. Even going so far as to stop listening to his audio books altogether. The truth was, he was thinking about his future, how he would do what he was planning to do.
It would be more than easy he knew, but more than anything, he considered what it would be like to meet his brother again after all this time.
'CAAAAAAAM!'
Cam snapped out of his trance suddenly, looking towards the ground where there was a small crowd. Someone was calling out for him.
'What is it?!' Cam hollered back.
'They're coming again!' the man called back. 'There!'
Cam turned his head in the direction the man was pointing, seeing the horizon before him.
He rose to his feet, standing tall on the rooftop completely calm.
There were many more men than before. They had snuck up upon the town using the cover of the trees and were close now. And more were coming.
Cam lingered on the roof for a moment longer, before moving.
The people upon the ground beneath him gasped in disbelief as he flew, like a bird, he soared through the air.
Cam landed in the centre of the mass of soldiers, acting quickly, though to him everything seemed to slow.
He completely destroyed everything around him. There was over three hundred men, and they were all killed within less than a single second, even the trees some of the men were still hiding amongst had been destroyed. The thick trunks of the trees decades old were sliced in two, right across the middle, and around Cam now, fresh blood seeped into the earth.
Everyone around him was dead, every one of the soldiers, and Cam just stood there calmly.

It was unmistakable from this moment, no one could deny that it was Cam killing the men. The townsfolk saw it clear as day. Cam was killing these men in the most horrific way. But he was protecting. However, it was inevitable that some people began to fear him from that moment on.
Some called him an angel, the way he glowed, the way he protected the people of the town with such efficiency and ease.
Others called him a demon, the way he slaughtered people, so easily and without a thought.
It was after this day, that some people fled the town altogether, simply to get away from him, for they feared him more than they feared the men that had moved to attack the town.
There were of course those who chose to stay.

Lucy stood beside Cam now, watching sadly, though showing no emotion, as the townspeople who had decided to stay, moved the bodies to a place further away from the town, piling them high ready to burn.
They had waited for a few hours for the blood to dry, for the bodies to stop bleeding. Then after that, those that had chosen not to leave the town, worked together to move the bodies.
Lucy standing beside Cam turned to him then, watching him for a moment. But Cam did not look away, he did not look towards her, but continued to watch the bodies.
'Alright' a man said approaching Cam. 'We are done. That is all of them.'
Cam glanced towards this man, before looking back at the pile of bodies before him. To him they appeared only as a haze, his eyes were blurry.
What's wrong with my new eye? Why isn't it working properly?
He couldn't see the bodies clearly, but already he could smell the stench of death. He could smell the blood heavy in the air.
Cam blinked slowly, giving no more reaction.
Before him the pile of bodies began to burn, nothing setting it off. Cam's magic was controlled, and as the people watched, surrounding the mass of dead soldiers, the fire blazed brightly, the intense heat from the fire completely disintegrating the bodies.
By the time the fire burned down, all that was left was scorched and blackened earth still smoking.
This all happened very quickly, and most people stayed to watch.
When it was all over, Cam simply walked away.
Lucy called out to him, but whether he heard her or not, he did not react, but carried on walking.

Weeks later

Cam sat upon the grassy area of the small garden at the back of the home with the little girl. Her mother hanging up sheets on the line nearby watching over them as Cam continued to make daisy chains with the girl, using his mind more than his touch to work.
'You're doing it wrong' the girls scolded him. 'Look you do it like this.'
'You're just better at this than I am' Cam smiled to the girl, sitting before her with his legs crossed. 'I am no good.'
'It's easy' the girl told him, taking his hands in both of hers, 'look, you just do it like this.'
Cam smiled as the girl tried to show him. 'See?'
The mother glanced over at them with a smile briefly, before returning to her choirs.
'I'm afraid my eyes are not what they used to be' Cam said to the girl kindly. 'I cannot see very well.'
'That's what my grandad says.'
Cam began to chuckle.
'Come on' the girl said. 'Try again.'
Cam took another few flowers in between his fingers, trying to work.

‘You’re so good at everything else’ the girl said, ‘and you can’t do this.’
Cam leant back laughing lightly at her.
‘Amelia’ the girl’s mother spoke then. ‘Come inside now, you need to take your medicine.’
‘But I don’t like it’ the girl complained.
‘Don’t be stubborn, it’s good for you. It will make you better.’
‘But I’ve been sick for so long’ the girl complained, it’s not working.’
The girl trudged miserably towards her mother, head bowed as Cam rose to his feet.
‘Come on then’ the mother spoke to her daughter, placing a hand gently upon her head, ‘inside now.’ She turned back to Cam as Amelia made her way towards the home. ‘Would you like to come in for some tea?’
‘Yes please’ Cam answered gratefully. ‘I would love some.’
The mother nodded, moving away towards the house then, Cam following after her.
It was a small but pleasant home with a modest garden around the outside, and inside, it was cosy.
Cam sat at the small table in the centre of the kitchen, opposite the table was Amelia’s grandfather who sat back in his chair, eyes closed. He was completely blind.
‘Those flowers are looking really beautiful in the garden aren’t then?’ the grandfather said to him.
‘Yes, they are’ Cam smiled warmly back.
‘Cynthia told me about them’ the grandfather smiled widely as the mother moved closer to her father, placing his tea before him and kissing him briefly on the forehead.
‘Thank you father’ she grinned, before moving towards Cam and giving him his tea.
‘Cynthia has such a way with words’ the grandfather continued, ‘the way she describes the flowers is so beautiful.’
‘Oh father’ Cynthia smiled. ‘Please don’t, you know how much I hate being flattered.’
Cynthia moved over to her daughter then who waited at the edge of the kitchen.
‘How do you get the flowers to grow so beautifully?’ Cam asked Cynthia as she guided Amelia across the kitchen towards the cupboards.
‘They are difficult to grow’ Cynthia replied, taking a small dark bottle from the cupboard. ‘You have to watch them carefully. They are very delicate flowers. You have to watch them closely at all times.’
‘I would love to be able to grow such flowers’ Cam mumbled into his tea. ‘They are….so beautiful.’
‘I could teach you if you like’ Cynthia said to him, spooning some of the liquid from the bottle into her daughter’s mouth. ‘Now swallow it please. I won’t let you go until you do.’
Amelia swallowed the medicine, making a face as she did.
‘It tastes so bitter’ Amelia complained.
‘I know’ Cynthia replied, ‘you say that every time. Now why don’t you go outside and play?’
Amelia skipped back outside, dancing across the kitchen.
‘Stay in the garden’ Cynthia called after her. ‘Stay close to the house!’
‘Yes mama.’
Cynthia moved over towards the window, watching her daughter for a moment before turning back to Cam and her father.
‘Would you like me to teach you how to grow flowers like these?’ Cynthia said to Cam.

‘Oh…...’ Cam sighed. ‘I would love that but…’ he looked away again. ‘I don’t think I have very long left to live. There is much that I still have to do in this world. I will…… well…’ he trailed off. ‘It’s not going to be clean.’ He smiled at Cynthia sadly. ‘I like it here now’ he said to the mother. ‘But I cannot stay forever.’
Cynthia smiled back at him, leaning against the counter behind her.
‘Would you like some cake?’
‘Oh, my daughter makes the best cakes’ the grandfather said eagerly. ‘They are the best cakes in the land.’
‘Again, with the compliments’ Cynthia laughed at her father, shaking her head in amusement.
‘I would love some cake’ Cam spoke softly to Cynthia. ‘Thank you.’

The third time was the last time the town was threatened. Cam heard the great bells within the town begin to ring.
He marched forwards towards the source of the noise as people began to call out to him, desperate for him to come to their aide.
Cam appeared on the edge of the town, standing alone as the people within the town watched from windows and rooftops with fear in their eyes, afraid for what they were about to see.
The army that faced the town now retained their distance. They were a considerable way away from the town, away from Cam. But Cam could still reach them more than easily.
‘Do you wish to harm these people?!’ he called out to them.
Cam narrowed his eyes, tilting his head to the side.
‘Cam!’ called a voice from above him.
He looked around, seeing a man from the town kneeling on the roof above him.
‘Did you hear what they said?’ the man asked Cam.
‘No’ Cam replied.
‘He said he’s going to kill us all. He’s said he’s going to kill you first. He said you’re a threat.’
‘*I’m* the threat?’ Cam mumbled, turning away from the man above him and back towards the army before him.
There were more of them than there had been last time, many more, he couldn’t see clearly, but he could see this much at least.
Cam blinked, exhaling slowly.

He turned away, heading back into town for something to eat.
It was many hours later, and it took all the work from the townsfolk to move the bodies, but there were over three hundred people that Cam had slaughtered, possibly as many as five hundred, and he had done this in under three seconds, without even the slightest effort. He had even killed the horses this time.
The people cleared the bodies now, and like the day before, they had waited for a few hours for the blood to dry so that it would be cleaner. Cam had sliced every man in half, completely separating them into two pieces, and the horses, they had their heads cut off.

‘You’re a monster’ someone said to Cam as he sat watching the bodies being carried away, as before he intended to burn them.
Cam turned towards the figure, seeing an elderly woman standing a few steps away from him.
Cam said nothing as he continued to watch her stoically.
‘I don’t care if you kill me’ the old lady spat hatefully, ‘I’m going to speak my mind no matter what. I’m going to speak the truth. You are a monster!’
‘I am not going to kill you’ Cam mumbled to her.
‘I hope something bad happens to you’ the woman snarled at him. ‘I hope someone kills you, I hope others see you for the monster that you are.’
‘You want me to die?’ Cam asked the old woman calmly.
‘Yes. You deserve it.’
Cam blinked slowly, smiling weakly then.
‘I suppose you are right’ he mumbled. ‘The only ones who should kill, are those who are prepared to be killed.’ He let out a breath. ‘I am not afraid to die.’
‘One of the men you killed was my son’ the old woman told him. ‘I hope someone kills you.’
‘Nobody can kill me’ Cam spoke calmly to her. ‘The only way I could die now….is if I choose to die…’

After that, Cam burned the bodies, as he had done before.

‘What’s this all about?’ Heremon grumbled, slouching into the council chamber tiredly with a hand to his head. ‘I’m too tired for this, and I’m still a bit drunk.’
‘There is a sorcerer within these lands’ Lamont spoke firmly. ‘He is a threat.’
Heremon looked down at him, and at the other council members. He took a seat at an empty chair, yawing widely.
The council was originally made up of forty members, twenty on the right and twenty on the left. But over the years, one by one they had died or gone missing. Now there were just eleven, six on the right and five on the left.
‘A sorcerer?’ Heremon repeated.
‘We told you this was urgent’ Tarrant said to him, groaning in agitation. ‘Why are you so late arriving?’
‘Ah’ Heremon sighed, ‘please don’t talk so loud.’
Castello turned his head slowly, regarding the other council members around him, before glancing back to Heremon.
‘Have you not heard what has happened?’ Tarrant said to Heremon as the others looked on silently.
‘No’ Heremon tilted his head. ‘What has happened?’ he asked with a smile playing about his lips, clearly amused. ‘Please tell me.’

‘A sorcerer’ Eden spoke up, ‘is killing soldiers in the hundreds.’
Heremon began to laugh then, his laughter quickly subsiding as he gripped his aching head with a groan.
‘We don’t believe it either’ Densil said to him, his friend Desmond beside him nodded mutely. ‘It does sound farfetched, I don’t know why we are taking this seriously but….’
‘What is it?’ Heremon asked.
‘We think it might be Cam….’
‘Cameron?’ Heremon sat up a little straighter in his seat, leaning forwards in his chair. ‘No’ he said. ‘He’s been missing for years…. he’s probably dead.’
The other council members watched him silently, and Castello stared unblinking around the room.
‘We know he was able to wield magic’ Valeri said, steepling his fingers, ‘but the reports we have been hearing…well…...they sound like something out of a fairy tale.’
‘He’s said to have killed hundreds of soldiers alone in the space of a single second.’
‘That is obviously an exaggeration’ Heremon said dismissively.
‘No’ Storin shook his head. ‘Some of us may not believe it, but you would believe your own soldiers, won’t you?’
‘Of course,’ Heremon replied. ‘I will send them to wherever this supposed sorcerer is and have him arrested.’
‘They were already sent’ Storin replied. ‘They are dead. All of them.’
Heremon stared back at Storin in shocked silence.
‘If you don’t believe anyone else, believe this’ he said, sliding a bound stack of papers towards Heremon. ‘Eyewitness accounts. Hundreds of them, several of which are from your own children.’
Heremon stared down at the papers in disbelief, for a moment unable to speak.
‘The death of the soldiers has been confirmed’ Storin replied. ‘The latest fires didn’t burn so brightly. There is an area of land outside this town that is littered with human bones. You can travel there to see for yourself.’
‘If it really is Cam’ Heremon whispered, finally at last taking the situation seriously, ‘I would not bring myself to him.’
‘Whatever the details’ Lamont spoke, ‘Cam’s magic has grown. He is a real threat to us now. And…… I doubt after everything that has happened to him…...that he doesn’t wish any ill upon us.’
Heremon went white. He glanced over towards Desmond, who looked equally as frightened now.
Desmond was the one who had tortured Cam, all those years ago. He had been one of the first people to see Cam’s magic first hand. And he doubted that Cam had forgotten what Desmond had done to make Cam’s magic release like that, and now he began to feel truly afraid.
‘What can we do?’ Agnus mumbled.
‘We have to protect the palace’ Rhona spoke quietly, ‘protect the palace and the city. He must be kept away from here.’
‘Do you think that is really possible?’ Heremon asked turning to him. ‘Maybe the stories are exaggerated but...’
‘They probably are’ Rhona replied. ‘But even if they are, he is still a very real threat to us.’

Heremon looked down at his lap.
‘We have to kill him’ Rhona said quietly. ‘He has to die.’
Castello looked away, towards the other members of the council. They were all completely silent. They were scared.

Just outside the door to the council chambers, there were two figures sitting upon the stairs right beside the door. These were the figures of Luke and his mother. They both sat utterly still, utterly quiet, straining their ears to hear what was going on. Miranda sat close to her son, one hand upon his shoulder. She narrowed her eyes.
‘He is alive’ she whispered. ‘Cam is alive…’

Lucy approached Cam, walking slowly.
Cam faced her.
‘Hey’ she mumbled.
‘Lucy…’
It was dark now, and the town was eerily silent. Cam and Lucy were alone here together, it was just the two of them.
‘I wanted to see you’ Lucy said to him.
‘Why?’
Cam moved past her slowly, sitting back against the low wall. He raised his head, though he could barely see her. It was dark, and he could not even see her hair clearly, but he could see her silhouette.
Lucy moved towards him, taking a step closer and holding her hands together.
‘I…...wanted to talk to you’ she mumbled.
‘About what?’
Lucy pursed her lips, hesitating.
‘I thought you had left forever’ Lucy uttered quietly. ‘I um…. I have something important to tell you… but I….’
Cam blinked slowly, staring at her. Though he didn’t say anything.
‘I um….’ She mumbled. ‘I….’ She let out a sigh, slumping her shoulders. ‘Do you ever feel that there is something you really want to tell someone, but you don’t know how?’
‘Not really’ Cam replied.
Lucy sighed again, bowing her head.
‘Regardless of what happens’ she said to him, ‘I am glad you’re back.’
Cam smiled at that, chuckling quietly to himself.
‘Are you joking?’
He ran his fingers through his long black hair.
‘I am a monster. Look at what I have done. Look at what I have become. I have killed so many people so easily, and I feel no remorse. I feel no pleasure, I feel nothing.’ He bowed his head, speaking in a hushed voice now. ‘Killing means nothing to me.’ He paused for a

moment then in thought. ‘I’ve fought monsters, hundreds of them with ease. My time with Beloved made me…a more confident person, strong around other people, stronger in unfamiliar situations…but now like this…I…have no experience. I know very little of love…I um…...I’ve always thought of you. I’ve wanted you but’ he shook his head. ‘It doesn’t matter. I would not be surprised if you were afraid of me… or despised me…’
‘I don’t feel that way towards you.’
Cam blinked slowly, eyes distant.
‘William did not believe what I told him about you’ Lucy whispered, ‘and he hardly believes it now. The existence of magic….’
‘I’m sorry I can’t hear you’ Cam droned.
‘I feel torn’ Lucy said, her voice breaking, ‘I don’t know what to do…’
Cam let out a heavy sigh, placing his hands upon his knees and rising to his feet.
‘I will leave this place soon’ Cam said, not facing Lucy as he spoke. ‘I will march onto the capital, I will take the palace, and I will make this world clean again. I will make this world mine…. everything….’
Lucy watched him sadly.
Cam walked without saying another word to her. He was found by a masked figure moments later.
‘You said you can control people sometimes’ Cam said to the masked figure. ‘Have you ever controlled Lucy?’
‘You want to know if we made her love you?’ the figure replied. ‘No. We have never controlled her in any way. We never changed her emotions or her thoughts. She fell in love with you on her own. She loves you because of you.’
‘How can she be married?’ Cam whispered. ‘I thought…I thought….’ He broke off.
Vergil raised his hand to his mask, taking it away from his face.
‘What will you do now?’ Vergil asked him.
‘For the longest time I’ve been thinking about what I will do and how things will turn out.’ Cam raised his head. ‘Lucy has moved on. She no longer loves me anymore, and I…’ he took a deep breath. ‘I think I have moved on also.’
Vergil listened in silence.
‘Perhaps I can travel to other worlds’ Cam wondered aloud. ‘Perhaps I can live in another world altogether and start a new life. After all of this is finished.’
‘What about your brother?’ Vergil questioned. ‘What about your duty as king?’
‘Yes’ Cam realised. ‘There is that. There is still the council.’ He hummed thoughtfully to himself. ‘Perhaps there is still reason to stay.’
‘What about Lucy?’
‘I have moved on from that now I think’ Cam mumbled back. ‘We both have.’
A silence passed between the two.
‘What will happen to me in the end?’ Cam spoke in a distant voice.
‘Will you march onto the capital?’ Vergil asked him.
‘Very soon’ Cam mumbled. ‘Tomorrow. I need a horse.’
‘You will have one’ Vergil told him. ‘When you wake up tomorrow, you will find a strong and fast stallion outside your home.’
‘Thank you’ Cam breathed.

‘This is going to be exciting’ Vergil smiled. ‘Don’t you agree?’
‘You enjoy death?’ Cam asked him.
‘Not necessarily’ Vergil mumbled. ‘I am just interested in your story. I wonder how it will end? I want to see…’

The next morning, Cam began to make preparations to leave.
He woke early, dressed, ate what little food he had left in the empty home, and stepped outside.
Glancing to the right he saw a beautiful black stallion tied to a pole just beside the door. It was already saddled and ready to go.
Cam threw over the horses back the single bag he carried. Just a few clothes and food were all he had.
Cam put his foot in the stirrup and mounted the saddle, jerking the reins back he turned the horse around, walking slowly through the town.
‘You’re leaving without saying goodbye?’
Cam pulled the reins back sharply, turning his head to the side. He saw a dark figure standing there, he had not noticed this figure before, but he recognised him instantly because of his voice. It was Vergil.
‘Say goodbye to who?’ Cam asked him. ‘I owe the people here nothing and they owe me nothing. I am nothing to them.’
‘Now you know that isn’t true’ Vergil smiled, unfolding his arms and gliding towards him, the dark cloak trailing behind. ‘And what about Lucy?’ Vergil asked.
‘What about her?’
‘Aren’t you going to say goodbye to her?’
‘What for?’ Cam replied flatly. ‘Lucy and I have nothing to do with each other anymore. We walk separate roads now. She has her own life….and I… I have to do what I have to do. I have to do my duty.’
‘She is crying.’
‘What?’
‘Lucy is crying’ Vergil repeated.
Cam narrowed his eyes, looking down at him, not understanding clearly what Vergil meant.
‘Did you not see the bruises on her face?’ Vergil asked him. ‘William beats her. He is hurting her now.’
Cam’s eyes were wide all of a sudden, he wheeled the horse around to face Lucy’s home, which was just a short distance away. Cam realised that Vergil had chosen to stop him here at this exact location.
Cam dismounted his horse, striding towards the home. It was very early in the morning, and no one was about yet, everything was silent. But as Cam approached the home, he could hear sounds. His heart dropped in his chest as he recognised Lucy’s voice. She was begging. She was afraid.
The front door opened gently as Cam approached the home, controlled by his magic.
He stepped into the kitchen, glancing to the side to see William standing over Lucy who was curled up on the floor, he was grabbing her by the hair.

William moaned in pain suddenly as Cam directed his magic towards him, putting a great pressure around William's hand, forcing him to let go of Lucy's hair.
'If I had any idea you were doing this' Cam said to him, approaching William who was pinned against the wall now by his magic, 'then I would have acted sooner.'
William said nothing, standing back against the wall now, unable to move a single inch, he simply stared back at Cam in terror.
'The self I used to be would have lost control and killed you' Cam spoke quietly and calmly to William. 'You are lucky I am not that person anymore.'
Cam glanced back at Lucy then, who was still on the floor sobbing.
He turned away from William without sparing him another glance.
Cam knelt before Lucy, reaching out to her, touching her beneath the chin with metallic fingers and lifting her head.
'How did I not see this before?' he mumbled. 'I am so disappointed with myself.'
He rose to his feet sharply then, walking away from them both and back towards the front door. He paused before he reached it, turning back to address William one last time.
'I cannot promise' he said to him, 'that next time I find out you've hurt someone, that I will not kill you. There will be no warning.' He strode out of the house again without another word to either of them.
'You should have told me' Cam snarled at Vergil moments later when he found him again.
Vergil only returned his gaze, saying nothing.
'No' Cam said turning away calmly now, 'of course not.'
'I won't be back for a while' Vergil said to him. 'I have things to do. Goodbye Cam. I love you.'
Cam raised his head, seeing Vergil vanish through the portal. He was gone.
He hadn't even given Cam a chance to respond.
Cam let out a heavy sigh, feeling so very tired.
He scratched his temple, looking about for his horse and making his way gingerly over to it. The creature had been standing there obediently where he had left it. It had been waiting for him. When he reached it, Cam patted its neck gratefully.
'He chose a good horse' he mumbled quietly to himself.
'Cam…'
He glanced around.
Lucy stood there, head bowed and hugging herself.
'What do you want?' he asked her. 'What are you doing here?'
'Cam please don't go' Lucy begged.
'Why?' Cam answered sharply. 'Why do you care about me? You know who I am. You know what horrible things I have allowed to happen because I was weak, and you know I have to set them right. And that will involve me doing…. *horrible things*…'
'Cam please…'
He turned to face her fully now.
She faltered, staring back at him with wide eyes.
'You're frightened?' he asked her.
'I cannot believe how much you've changed' she whispered.

‘I am not the same person I was when we last saw each other all those years ago’ Cam said to her. ‘It was inevitable that I would change after everything I went though.’
He turned back to his horse.
‘Cam please don’t go.’
‘Why should I stay? There’s nothing for me here.’
‘Cam you…...you have a son.’
Cam froze, turning back to Lucy slowly.
‘What did you just say?’ he whispered.
Lucy bowed her head, placing her hands together.
‘We um….’ Lucy spoke in a quiet voice. ‘We have a child together.’
‘I don’t believe what I’m hearing.’
‘Cam’ Lucy told him sadly. ‘I know we spent only a short time together…but we um…we lay together, and I…I found out I was pregnant, after you disappeared.’
Cam stared at her with a level expression, maintaining his silence.
Lucy covered her face then, sobbing into her hands.
‘I was so scared to tell you’ she whimpered. ‘But it’s true. We have a son together. I thought I had lost you. You were gone for years’ she cried. ‘I raised him without you, I raised him on my own…’
‘Are you telling the truth?’ Cam spoke quietly to her.
‘Yes’ Lucy spoke. ‘His name is Kanae. He is just gone five years old now.’
‘Where is he?’ Cam asked.
‘He’s far from here’ Lucy whispered, controlling herself now and wiping away her tears. ‘I came here with William to support him in the coming battles’ she said to him. ‘I was willing to die for him. I came here to be by his side in case he was to die.’
‘Why did he hurt you?’
Lucy bowed her head then, hand going to her face where there was still a bruise there.
‘You would not understand if I explained it to you, but he has trauma from his past, as I do.’
‘That does not give him an excuse to hurt you.’
‘He loses control’ Lucy told him sadly. ‘He wakes up in the nights screaming. He is afraid.’
‘He could kill you’ Cam told her shortly. ‘His fear does not give him an excuse to hurt other innocent people.’
‘I came here to be with William. I left Kanae with my aunt’ she told him, ‘for his own safety. To keep him away from war.’
‘You chose William over Kanae?’
‘William was fighting the enemy that was sweeping across these lands, moving towards my truth home. I travelled with him here to be by his side as he fought to protect us, even if I were to die.’
‘You would allow your son to grow up without a mother?’
Lucy said nothing.
‘You’ve done so much for us as a town’ Lucy said to him, ‘I never thought any of this was even possible.’
‘What do you want from me?’

‘I know you have to do what you have to do’ Lucy said to him, ‘and I know this is selfish of me…but I want to ask you one thing. I want to ask you…. if you will come home with me. I want you to meet your son.’
Cam stared at her for a moment longer, before turning away.
‘I hardly believe what you are saying.’
‘You think I am lying?’
Cam let out a heavy sigh, bowing his head.
‘No’ Cam mumbled. ‘I do believe you, I just cannot come to terms with it. Not just yet anyway.’

Later that day, Lucy met with William again. He was sitting alone outside in the garden of the home, Lucy had come to see him.
‘…William….’
He turned to her, with tears in his eyes.
‘How can you love me after what I do to you?’ he spoke.
She looked back at him sadly.
‘I’m sorry’ William whispered, looking at his hands again, holding them together before him.
‘After everything you’ve done for me’ William spoke in a voice barely audible, though she heard him clearly. ‘I cannot control the things I do, I just…. I lose myself and….to do that to you…’
Lucy knelt before him, taking his hands in her own.
‘I love you William.’
His face contorted with grief then, and she reached forwards to embrace him. He held her back tightly.
‘I love you so much Lucy…it hurts….’
Lucy leant back then, resting on her heels. She looked into his eyes sadly, caressing his cheek tenderly.
‘You should go back to Kanae’ he told her. ‘I…. I will go elsewhere.’
‘You’re leaving?’ Lucy voiced in alarm.
‘I…. I feel I need to move on. After what I’ve done.’
‘I don’t want you to go’ Lucy pleaded. ‘I love you. Kanae loves you.’
‘Lucy’ William spoke seriously, taking her hands and pushing them gently away from him. ‘I am not a good person after what I have done to you. I should not even…’ he trailed off, shaking his head. ‘Go now with Cam’ he told her. ‘The two of you have a history together, he has a child with you. You should be together.’
‘As a family?’ Lucy asked him flatly. ‘Look at him. Look at me. I don’t think things will ever be that way.’
‘They won’t if you don’t even try’ William told her sadly.
‘He a king’ Lucy said to him. ‘He will return some day to the throne, someday soon.’ She pursed her lips, falling silent for a moment. ‘I have convinced him to wait just a little longer. He will come with me to see our son, but…he does not love me anymore.’
William looked down at her sadly.

‘I trust him’ he said to her. ‘Despite everything he is and has done, he has not hurt you…. I trust him…. he protected this town.’
Lucy bowed her head, resting her hands upon his knees as William stared down at her.

Cam waited for Lucy, sitting in the driver’s seat of the small cart, the black stallion he had found outside his home was waiting before him, head bowed and standing patiently.
He had been waiting for only a short time when Lucy arrived.
Cam turned his head to the side as he saw movement, a figure approaching. He recognised her beautiful orange hair.
She stepped up onto the cart, taking a seat beside him and maintaining a short gap between them.
Cam glanced down as she placed a small bag at her feet, all the things she would be taking back with her, the few possessions she had brought. What little Cam owned was in the cart behind them.
‘Where did you get the horse and this cart?’ she asked him quietly.
Cam blinked slowly back at her.
‘Are you ready to go? he asked her shortly without answering the question.
Lucy looked away, dipping her head. ‘Yes’ she answered quietly. ‘I’m ready.’
‘Which road is it?’ he asked her.
‘Oh, I haven’t told you yet’ Lucy mumbled.
Cam glanced over at her without speaking, his eyes flat.
‘Follow the main road out of this town’ Lucy told him, ‘and take the left path.’
Cam snapped the reins sharply, sending the cart forwards with a jolt as the stallion jerked forwards suddenly. Lucy held herself as they moved onwards, heading out of the town. Cam held the reins, completely ignoring Lucy from then on.
As the cart left the town, neither of them looking back, they were watched closely by a single figure clad in black, staring after then through the windows in the plague mask.
Vergil leant back against the wall, folding his arms. He smiled behind his mask, feeling content.
‘Goodbye Cam’ he spoke to the air. ‘See you again when next we meet.’

The journey was long and silent, but several hours later at last, they came to another town. It was smaller than the one they had left behind, it was very different. The buildings were smaller, not made of stone for the most part, but made of wood, and the roads between the buildings were wider. Cam began to glance around him as they moved through the town, eyes wide as he struggled to see. The journey to this new town had been uneventful, and he was glad to finally reach their destination. They had travelled without rest and came to this town hours later.

The sky above was cloudy, for which Cam was thankful for. On sunny days, he struggled at times being outside. The light was bright in his eyes, and he could see less clearly on these days. If anything, he preferred darker days. They weren't such a strain for him.
Cam glanced briefly towards Lucy then, seeing her leaning away from him, looking in the opposite direction.
'Are we close?' Cam asked her speaking quietly.
'Turn here' Lucy said to him. 'We are nearly there.'
They approached a modest home, set a little apart from the others.
'Here' Lucy said as they drew closer to the home, 'just stop here.'
Cam pulled the reins back, causing the stallion to slow to a stop.
Lucy got off the cart quickly, moving away from him and towards the home. She glanced towards Cam briefly.
'Wait here' she told him shortly, before moving into the house.
Cam let out a sigh, sitting back down and leaning forwards on his knees, weaving his metallic fingers together.
Cam tensed slightly, suddenly realising there was a masked figure beside him.
The figure giggled at him, the voice was female.
Cam blinked, and an instant later the figure was gone.
He let out a sigh, hanging his head. He glanced up when he heard a faint sound over the ringing in his ears. Lucy was standing in the doorway of the home. She was watching him. She appeared to be hesitant.
Lucy drew a slow breath, closing the door behind her before approaching the cart.
'Please come inside' she told him tentatively.
Cam tilted his head at her, hesitating for an instant before moving off the cart.
He remained where he was for a moment watching her, the distance held between them, and then he stepped forwards.
Lucy turned, heading slowly back to the front door.
She stopped before it, hand hovering over the handle for a moment. She glanced back at Cam, who stood behind her waiting silently.
Lucy opened the door and moved forwards, turning and holding the door open for Cam to enter.
Cam stepped into the home.
The first thing he saw was an older woman waiting for him, presumably Lucy's aunt, as she had said. There was no one else in the kitchen.
Lucy closed the door behind Cam, turning back to the room.
'Cam' Lucy spoke quietly, 'this is Talia.'
Cam raised his head slightly, narrowing his eyes to try to see the woman better. But the woman looked afraid, Cam did not acknowledge her.
'Talia' Lucy mumbled nervously, 'this…this is Cam…. he's…the one I've told you about. He is Kanae's father.'
Cam looked away from Talia, glancing about the home. It was very spacious, but very empty.
'Where is Kanae?' Lucy asked Talia.
'Uh…' the lady replied, finally finding her voice. She glanced about her, 'he…. was here…'
Lucy looked around her.

‘Kanae’ she called. ‘Come out here.’
There was the smallest sound coming from the next room, the sound of movement, though Cam did not hear this.
A hand appeared around the doorframe, and a head tentatively peered around the corner.
Cam only turned towards this direction because he saw that Lucy and Talia were looking this way too, and he didn’t see boy vanish around the corner again, frightened by Cam.
‘Kanae’ Lucy spoke harshly now. ‘Come out.’
Cam stared now, narrowing his eyes at the doorway. And then he saw movement, though just barely.
A hand appeared around the corner then, and the boy looked around for the second time into the room.
‘Come here Kanae’ Lucy told him tiredly. ‘Now.’
The boy stepped out from around the corner, moving forwards reluctantly with his hands behind his back, walking slowly.
Lucy approached him, placing her hand on his back and steering him back towards the centre of the room, back towards Cam.
She held the boy before Cam now, hands upon his shoulders as she presented him to Cam.
‘Cam’ she said. ‘This is Kanae. Our son.’
Cam stared down at the boy silently for a moment before kneeling, coming to his level, resting an elbow on a knee.
The boy before him stared back wide eyed at his father, shoulders hunched and frozen. He was terrified by him.
Cam let out a breath, blinking slowly.
After a few seconds he rose silently, turning and walking out of the home without another word.
Lucy stared after him in shock.
She ran after him, catching him outside.
‘Cam wait!’
‘I need to be alone for a moment’ he answered quietly, glancing back at her.
‘What is wrong?’ Lucy asked him, her voice breaking, ‘please…’
‘I will be back’ Cam replied, ‘later…’
‘Cam wait’ Lucy rushed forwards reaching out to him.
Cam suddenly vanished in the blink of an eye, leaving Lucy standing there stunned.
She let out a breath, eyes wide in shock and disbelief. She lowered her hand, eyes glazed over as she bowed her head.
She turned back to the house, having escaped by magic, she knew she would not find him now.
She sighed unhappily, heading back.
When she opened the door, she saw Kanae was crying in Talia’s arms, Talia kneeling and holding him firmly, trying to comfort him.
‘What’s wrong?’ Lucy asked.
‘He’s afraid’ Talia said to her, ‘and so am I.’ She raised her head to Lucy then, concern and slight fear in her expression and demeanour. ‘Who *was* that?’

‘Everything I told him about you was true’ Lucy told her sadly. ‘But I have so much more to tell you.’

It was hours later, long after it had gotten dark, that Lucy remained, still sitting upon the carriage they had travelled in. The horse had been taken to a nearby field to rest and had been cared for. Now, Lucy waited alone for Cam to return.
‘Lucy.’
His voice had caught her off-guard, and she jumped at the sound of her name.
‘Cam’ she whispered, tears coming to her eyes. ‘Are you alright? I thought you might not be back.’
He just stood there, staring at her.
‘Cam, please speak to me.’
‘Is he really my son?’ Cam asked her. ‘Is it true?’
Lucy bowed her head, holding her hands together.
‘Yes’ she answered quietly. ‘I…found out I was pregnant shortly after you disappeared. I knew I wanted a child, because…. well I…. I loved you and I still…’ she let out a shuddering breath, body tense and shoulders hunched. ‘Things have been so difficult. Kanae has asked so many times where his father is….and I have not been able to tell him about you, because I had no idea where you went, you were gone for so long. I thought after a time that you were dead.’
‘I did not choose to leave’ Cam replied in a deadpan voice. ‘I did not have a choice.’
‘Cam…’ Lucy whispered. ‘I’m…. I’m sorry…’ she lowered her head into her hands, crying silently then.
When Cam had last known her, he would have comforted her, his old self would have been desperate to stop her from being sad, desperate to hold her in his arms.
But now Cam simply continued to watch her silently, maintaining the distance between them.
‘I just feel so messed up’ Lucy sobbed, lifting her head again, tears streaming down her cheeks. ‘My head is just a mess…. I cannot even think straight. I’m so confused and….’ She gritted her teeth, holding her breath, trying to control herself. ‘I’m sorry’ she whispered, ‘it’s not right of me to complain, after everything you’ve been through.’
‘I don’t dwell on the past’ Cam replied. ‘At least I try not to, I…...well…...it doesn’t matter.’
‘I don’t know what to do’ Lucy whispered.
‘I have to leave soon’ Cam told her. ‘I have to march onto the palace and take back what is rightfully mine…. I have to fix my mistakes. It is my fault, everything that has happened…I just…’ he shook his head.
‘I don’t want you to leave.’
‘What do you want from me?’ Cam said to her coldly.
‘Cam’ Lucy whimpered, forcing herself to speak. ‘I know it is selfish, but I want you to stay here and be with your son.’
‘What is the end goal?’ Cam asked quickly. ‘What do you want from all of this in the end? To be a family? Do you know what I am now? What I’ve become?’

‘I know you’ve changed’ Lucy whispered, continuing to cry. ‘I don’t care what you say. I know you’ve changed, but you are still Cam.’
‘Depends on how you look at it’ Cam answered in a monotone. ‘I am still this same body, but I have changed so much, I feel for the better…if that can be believed. I am no longer the frightened victim-child I used to be. That person is dead. I am glad I am no longer that weak pathetic victim. I can do things that people in this world could not even imagine.’
‘In this world…’ Lucy repeated. ‘You have changed so much, and yet you still are you.’
‘That makes no sense.’
Lucy sighed, turning away.
‘So, what are you going to do?’ Lucy asked him. ‘Are you just going to leave?’
Cam breathed deeply.
‘No’ he groaned. ‘If you want me to stay, then I will stay, at least for now. At least for a short time.’
For a moment Lucy was stunned into silence. She couldn’t speak.
‘Do you really mean it?’ she whispered.
‘Yes’ Cam replied. ‘I will stay, but only for a time.’
‘Thank you’ she breathed. ‘That….. that means a lot to me.’
Cam stared at her tiredly, before bowing his head in silence, closing his eyes.

Cam disappeared again shortly after that, returning the next morning at around midday, though he would not say where he had been all night.
‘Are you hungry?’ Lucy asked him.
They were in the kitchen of her home now, and it was quiet. It was only himself and Lucy there. No one else.
‘No’ Cam replied.
‘Have you eaten?’
‘Yes.’
Lucy raised her head, looking as if she wanted to say more, but then changed her mind.
‘Kanae is outside’ Lucy mumbled, looking down to what she was doing again, ‘he is out playing with Talia.’
Lucy moved across the room, placing the cup of tea before him.
‘I don’t know how you like it’ she said to Cam, as he took the teacup, lifting it to his lips.
‘Its fine’ Cam mumbled, drinking deeply from the cup and finishing it quickly before putting it back down with a sigh.
Lucy blinked uncertainly, staring back at him.
‘Do you want more?’ she asked him.
‘No, I’m good.’
Lucy took the cup back and washed it quickly, turning back to him.
She moved closer, sitting opposite him at the table, leaning forwards on her elbows.
‘So’ Lucy asked him quietly. ‘What happens now?’
Cam sighed wearily, running his metallic hand down his face.
He didn’t really want to think about what came next.
‘Maybe I should leave’ he grumbled. ‘Kanae….’ He trailed off.

‘I think….’ Lucy began, but she never finished, instead turning away. ‘This is all so frustrating’ she whispered.
‘You’re upset.’
‘How can you tell?’ Lucy replied sarcastically.
‘I can sense your thoughts’ Cam mumbled. ‘I can…...’ he blinked slowly then. ‘I can feel people’s intentions, in my mind….’ He sighed again. ‘There are so many thoughts.’
Lucy held her hands together before her, watching him closely.
She was about to speak again, when the door to the home opened. They both glanced around.
‘Mother’ Kanae cried out, hurrying up to her.
He baulked then, spotting Cam suddenly.
Kanae drew back sharply, holding his hands balled to his chest as Cam stared back at him.
Lucy rose from her seat, moving over to Kanae, picking him up in her arms.
‘Morning Lucy’ Talia sighed, following after Kanae through the front door.
She paused with a surprised expression, not expecting to see Cam there.
Cam raised his head slightly, reaching his consciousness out towards Talia, sensing her thoughts.
Cam tilted his head at her then, considering her, blinking slowly at her.
‘I frighten you’ he said to Talia.
‘Oh’ Talia mumbled, unable to speak anymore.
‘What is it exactly?’ he said to her. ‘Is it my strange eyes? My arms? Or everything?’
‘I thought you knew what people were thinking’ Lucy mumbled to him.
‘No’ Cam grumbled to her. ‘I can sense intentions, not read people’s thoughts, not exactly anyway…. not like reading a book. I can feel emotions within other people, especially if they are stronger.’ He smiled weakly, turning back to face Talia again. ‘She is even more afraid of me now for just saying that’ he voiced. ‘I don’t blame you, I would be frightened of myself if our places were switched. But I promise I won’t harm you.’

They went out together after that, like a family would have done, but this felt different.
Talia and Kanae went ahead together to play. There was a small children’s park within the little town, built in an open area and made of wood.
Kanae ran forwards excitedly, followed by Talia who watched over him closely.
There were other children there also, but the park was mostly empty.
Lucy and Cam stood a distance away at the edges of the park, watching Kanae and Talia.
‘It’s a really nice town here’ Lucy spoke up, as she and Cam stood with a space between them, leaning on the fence and looking into the park. ‘But I won’t let myself become naïve. I know there are dangers still out there, and I will not allow myself to fall into a false sense of security.’ Lucy paused thoughtfully. ‘Things are different now though’ she said to Cam. ‘I feel safer with you here now.’
Cam blinked slowly, the edges of his lips curling in a smile, though he didn’t say anything.
‘I travelled with William to the other town’ Lucy mumbled. ‘The soldiers were sweeping across the land, towards this town…. towards Kanae.’ She sighed deeply. ‘I feel safer’ she breathed. ‘I’m glad you’re back.

Cam said nothing, continuing to watch Kanae as he began to play with the other children around him, Talia standing and talking with several other figures, mothers and fathers.
'He's five years old' Lucy said to Cam.
Cam continued to remain silent, leaning forwards on the wooden fence.
'He's a really good boy' Lucy said to Cam, 'he um…' she smiled awkwardly, as if unsure of what to say. 'I never thought I'd have a child' Lucy laughed to herself, scratching the back of her head nervously and glancing away. 'This is all so strange for me, even now. Even after all these years sometimes I still cannot believe I am a mother.' She ran her fingers through her hair and beside her, Cam continued to stare silently towards the park.
Lucy turned her head to face Cam. 'It was totally unexpected, but I was happy' Lucy told him. 'Being a mother…. it's such a wonderful feeling.'
Cam still did not reply.
'I just wish' Lucy continued, 'that….um….' she sighed again. 'I wish my family were still alive. My mother…and my father would have loved to….um….' she groaned. 'They were such good parents to me' she went on. 'They would have loved to have had another child to care for. They both loved children.'
'Hm' Cam frowned. 'I wish I had had a different mother. My brother and I grew up alone.'
'I want the best for Kanae' Lucy whispered.
'I don't want Kanae to have anything to do with the throne' Cam mumbled. 'I don't want him to have anything to do with me. I think….' He trailed off, never finishing his thought.
Lucy frowned at him sadly.
'You said you had a bad childhood' Lucy said to him, 'because you were alone. Your father whom you loved died, and your mother who was indifferent to you lived.' She shook her head. 'I know…. you are probably not the best person to care for a child' she spoke carefully, 'and I mean that in the best possible way but…. you are still his father.'
'And you are sure this child is defiantly mine?'
'Without a doubt' Lucy spoke sincerely. 'He was born before I met William, and William cared for him.' She fell silent for a moment before continuing. 'I won't see him again. Not now. I want you to be a good father to him, because you are his true father. I don't care about anything else. I want you.'
'Do you really?'
'Yes' Lucy told him. 'This is hard for me to admit, but I still have feelings for you, though I doubt you feel the same.'
Cam said nothing, continuing to stare away towards the park.
Lucy laughed to herself then, hand going to her head. 'My head is a mess' she laughed, 'I can hardly think straight.'
'You want us to be a happy family?' Cam asked her sarcastically. 'Just like the ones in the stories I've read.'
'No' Lucy spoke firmly. 'Families like that do exist. My family were always good to me, we loved each other. But look at what happened to us in the end. Most of the people I have loved are dead.'
'Family means nothing to me' Cam groaned.
'I know that isn't true' Lucy answered quickly, 'and I know you don't truly believe that. You loved your father, you still love your brother.'

Cam narrowed his eyes as he listened to her speak.
'The boy is afraid of me.'
Lucy did not respond to this, but continued to watch him with concern.
'No matter what happens from here on out' she told him, speaking after a time, 'I am glad you're here now.'

That night, Cam left Lucy's home once more, wanting to be alone.
He walked through the silent town, reaching out his conscious all around him, and feeling nothing but peace.
It was very late, and most people were sleeping now, but there was somewhere he wanted to go.
Within the centre of the town, there was a holy temple. It had been so long that Cam had been away from his own world, and he had almost forgotten these gods that were worshiped in these lands. But it came back to him now, and as he walked across the empty and silent hall, he saw the gods and goddesses on either side, and he remembered them.
There was Micro, a woman that was part bird, with her single wing stretched out over the lands on which she grew healthy crop. There was Faeroe, a man with a great spiked disk on his back, fox-like ears upon his head, and a long lizard-like tail sweeping around his stone feet. Ludus, a beautiful deity clad in gold with a crown of blue feathers. Filis, depicted as a six-winged boy with two long horns growing upwards. Zeana, a woman with great curved horns, pointed ears and eyes that were covered by her own long hair that was tied around her head. Kachi, a beautiful maiden and mother of the sea, where it was believed all life began. And last of all, Ezla, the one that Cam admired the most. He was depicted as a man growing out of stone, his face contorted with grief and rage. This was the god whom it was believed trapped Micro beneath the earth for eighty years because he had fallen madly in love with her. Without Micro to warm the land, the earth had been covered in frost, and all plants died. Many thought Ezla was evil for doing this, but many, including Cam, believed he was passionate, kind and full of love, and pain.
'You're not real' Cam mumbled up to the statue as he stood before it. 'None of you are real. And you never were.'

Cam ascended the spiral stairs of one of the towers, experiencing suddenly the sensation of a memory coming back to him, though it was gradual at first, he began to realise what was familiar to him was the tower itself. It was like that one in the palace, at the bottom of which was an unlocked door, the tower back then, had been the only place from which he could see the outside world, back when he was trapped in the palace, a prisoner in his own home.
He came to the top of the tower and stepped out onto the open balcony, which ran in a circle around in a full circle.
The cool wind hit him, blowing his long hair back and whipping past his ears.
Cam breathed slowly, closing his eyes, his chest rising and falling gradually.
He found a sort of peace here alone. Things seemed so different for him now, even he himself could hardly believe how much he had changed. He used to pray to the gods of these lands so

often, now he realised how different things here, his perspective of everything he thought he had known had changed so dramatically, and nothing could go back to the way it used to be.
'One day' Cam mumbled to himself, 'one day…I will…. return to the palace.' He sighed deeply, feeling suddenly very tied. 'I will he the king I should have been, better than I could ever have been before, better even than my father, and those that came before him.'
He leant back against the cold rock wall behind him, staring at the open and silent world, hearing nothing but the ringing in his ears, which he hardly even seemed to notice now, unless he thought about it.
His head ached, and he felt a shooting pain in the left side of his head, inside his ear.
Cam gritted his teeth, lifting his hand and covering his left ear, grimacing, he hardly noticed his right shoulder jerk then. As the sensation of pain passed, he straightened up again, lifting his head to the horizon.
He reached his thoughts out, sensing something behind him. It was fear.
There was someone with him.
Cam let out a sigh, running his fingers though his hair, feeling ever so tired.
'I know you are there' he spoke sombrely. 'Come out, there is no need to hide.'
After a few moments of silence, there was still no movement.
Cam turned to glance behind him, unable to hear anything clearly. He spoke again.
'Kanae.'
He waited patiently, watching the open doorway. Eventually a hand appeared around the edge, and a face peered out, much as it had before when Cam had first met him.
'You don't need to be afraid' Cam yawned. 'I'm not going to hurt you.'
The boy just stared at him, not moving.
'Why are you out here?' Cam asked.
The boy still did not answer.
Cam smirked then, straightening up and tilting his head at the boy.
'You shouldn't leave your home like this' he told the boy. 'Its not good to wander off, especially without telling anyone. Your mother would be worried and upset if she found you gone.'
Cam stared at the boy, waiting for a response.
At last, Kanae spoke.
'It's not dangerous here' he said. 'It's safe. Mother told me.'
'And what makes it safe?' Cam asked the boy.
'There are no soldiers coming anymore' Kanae replied. 'She said you killed them, she said you saved this town.'
Cam stared at the boy with a flat expression, blinking slowly.
'You know what is scarier than a soldier coming to kill you?' he asked Kanae. 'Someone you can't hide from.'
'Like who?' Kanae asked.
'You have so much to learn' Cam told him. 'This world is cruel…. life is hard and the people….' He trailed off. 'There are few people you can truly trust in this world, there are few people you can trust in your life. But your mother is one of them. Trust her.'
'I do' Kanae replied simply.
Cam sighed at the boy, tilting his head, his black hair falling over his eyes.

‘Some family members kill their own children’ he said. ‘Some…...neighbours hurt each other. The most dangerous people are those that hide in plain sight, those that look kind. But I can sense everyone’s intentions, and no one can hide from me.’
‘Are you really my dad?’ Kanae asked Cam suddenly.
‘Yes, I am’ Cam replied. ‘Your…mother tells me…. that it is true.’
‘The other kids have fathers’ Kanae said to him. ‘Why weren’t you around? Where did you go, and why did you come back now?’
Cam stared at Kanae for a moment, unsure of what to say. He turned his head away then, smiling silently to himself.
‘Oh’ he simply said, ‘…...oh…’
He turned back to the boy.
‘Your fear of me is slightly less’ he said, though was talking to himself. ‘That’s good I suppose.’
‘You know what I’m feeling?’ Kanae asked.
‘Come on’ Cam said stepping towards him. ‘I’m going to walk you home. You shouldn’t be out here.’
‘You are’ Kanae replied. ‘You’re out on your own.’
Cam bit his tongue.
Kanae moved back as Cam walked past him, heading back down the stairs.
‘Follow me’ Cam grumbled, walking down the spiral staircase.
He paused at the base of the tower, glancing back to see if Kanae was following, he appeared moments later, keeping a distance.
Cam turned again, walking ahead. He guided Kanae back to his home, opening the door silently and stepping in.
‘Go to your bed’ Cam told Kanae. ‘Go to sleep and don’t leave again when it’s so late. You will upset your mother.’
Kanae lingered where he stood for a moment, before turning away and running upstairs.
Cam remained where he was, standing in the doorway. After a time, he turned away, leaving the house again, and closing the door behind him. He made his way through the town again, walking silently through the night.

The next day Lucy sat in the kitchen of her home, leaning forwards on the counter and staring out of the window.
Behind her sitting at the table, Talia and Kanae ate their meal.
‘Are you alright Lucy?’ Talia asked her then.
‘Yeah’ Lucy replied glumly. ‘I’m just….’ She sighed, trailing off.
‘Why don’t you have something to eat?’ Talia suggested.
‘I’m not hungry.’
‘You’re looking for Cam,’ Talia said. It was not phrased as a question.
‘I’m worried about him.’
‘He can look after himself.’
Lucy said nothing.
‘I have to go’ she said after a time, straightening up. ‘I’m going to look for him.’

‘Its no use’ Talia replied.
‘I want to’ Lucy said, ‘I….’ she swallowed the lump in her throat. ‘I feel so restless just standing around here.’
Lucy left the home quickly, wandering listlessly outside as she meandered around the town at random.
She found him at last, turning to see him approaching behind her.
‘I saw you a distance away’ Cam spoke in a mumble. ‘Your hair….’
‘I was looking for you’ Lucy replied.
Cam stared back at her.
‘Where do you go?’ Lucy asked him.
‘I uh…’ Cam sighed. ‘Just about really. I mean…nowhere…’
‘You never come home during the nights’ Lucy said to him. ‘It would….be nice to…um…’ she glanced away.
‘I don’t have a home’ Cam replied without much thought. ‘Well…. the palace’ he added as an afterthought.’
‘Yes’ Lucy replied unhappily. ‘I know.’
A moment of silence passed between them.
‘I um’ Lucy began. ‘I would like it if um…you would live with us, in our home.’
‘Ok’ Cam replied non-committedly.
‘Is there somewhere you’ve been staying all this time?’ she asked him raising her head.
‘Yeah’ Cam replied. ‘But it doesn’t matter.’
‘Come home with me’ Lucy offered, ‘I would like us to have dinner together. Talia and Kanae are eating together now.’
‘If that is what you would like’ Cam replied, again non-committedly.
‘Come on then’ Lucy said glumly, turning away.
Cam followed Lucy back to her home. Talia and Kanae glanced up nervously as he entered.
‘I found him’ Lucy breathed tiredly to Talia, looking a little flushed as she smiled awkwardly.
‘You can sit here’ Lucy said to Cam, indicating an empty chair, and Cam sat without a word.
‘Are you hungry?’ Lucy asked him.
‘I guess. Yeah.’
Lucy cut him some meat, spooning vegetables onto his plate and putting it in front of him, before sitting at the table herself.
Talia and Kanae who had finished eating, stayed now watching him, Kanae sitting on Talia’s lap silently.
‘Do you like it?’ Lucy asked Cam tentatively.
‘Meat’s too dry’ Cam replied promptly. ‘You cooked it too long.’
He continued to eat.
‘Ok’ Lucy replied uncertainly. ‘Do you…know how to cook?’
‘Yes’ Cam answered. ‘I am actually a good cook. I can do all sorts I used to have no clue about. I can farm, care for animals, clean…’ he put his fork down, glancing towards Lucy. ‘Are there jobs you want me to do around here?’ he asked her. ‘Maybe you have some cows or horses you need looking after?’
‘Oh no I didn’t mean anything like that’ Lucy answered hastily, waving him away.

‘I’m not going to be a drain. I will stay if you want me to’ Cam told her. ‘But…I want to help. Maybe I can help you cook’ he added, glancing down at the food again, before putting another forkful in his mouth. ‘Do you have any animals? Maybe I can slaughter some for you…. prepare some meat…. whatever…’ he continued to eat.
‘We um…have some pigs and chickens’ Lucy replied. ‘That is all.’
‘Mh-hm’ Cam replied.
‘So, um’ Lucy pressed on as opposite them Talia rose, carrying Kanae in her arms, she walked out of the room, heading outside, Cam raised his head briefly to watch them. ‘I would like you to stay here’ Lucy said. ‘Overnight I mean.’
‘Ok.’
‘I um…I have a separate room for you.’
‘Whatever you want.’
Lucy raised her head at him, her eyes large.
‘Where have you been staying?’ she asked him. ‘Where do you go when you are not here?’
‘I see my friends in the black masks.’
Lucy swallowed a little nervously at that.
‘I will stay if you want me to’ Cam told her, ‘though I’m afraid my company won’t be much fun.’
‘I still love you Cam’ Lucy mumbled.
Cam stopped chewing. He swallowed, putting his fork down he raised his head, staring, staring back at Lucy who watched him sadly. He blinked slowly.
‘I…’ Lucy began, leaning forwards on the table on her elbows. She laughed then. ‘I still feel….um…. I know this is hard’ she said reluctantly. ‘I still feel for you’ she mumbled to the table. I don’t care how much you’ve changed. You are still the father of my child….and…...nothing can change that….’ She smiled weakly then. ‘Nothing can change the history we’ve had together. Time and again we’ve met. Time and again our paths have crossed. It’s almost as if we were destined to be together.’
‘Maybe in the stories’ Cam replied flatly.
Lucy pursed her lips to stop them trembling.
‘Thank you for the meal’ Cam replied. ‘Now I must go.’
‘Where are you going?’ Lucy asked weakly.
‘I um…. just like to walk’ he told her. ‘That is all. I like to be alone.’
‘When are you coming back?’ Lucy asked, rising as Cam walked away.
‘I don’t know.’
‘Cam wait…’
He paused glancing back.
She hesitated, gritting her teeth.
‘Oh gods’ he moaned, grasping her head in her hands. ‘This is all so difficult for me. I don’t know what to do!’
‘You don’t have to do anything.’
She lowered her hands, her arms wrapping around herself as she hugged her own body.
‘It’s ok’ she said forcing a smile then. ‘I um……I think things will get better.’
‘Don’t forget what is about to happen’ Cam reminded her. ‘I will return to the palace someday. I will have to leave you.’

‘No’ Lucy shook her head. ‘Let me come with you.’
Cam hesitated.
‘What?’
‘I…...I don’t want to leave your side’ she told him. ‘When you return home to the palace, let me come with you.’
‘I don’t think that’s such a good idea’ Cam told her. ‘There will be a lot of death and…suffering.’
‘By your side is the safest place’ Lucy told him. ‘I don’t care what happens. I want Kanae and I both to be with you.’
‘It won’t be nice’ Cam warned. ‘I don’t want Kanae to….’ He sighed. ‘I don’t want him involved in the awful things I will do.’
‘The safest place is by your side’ Lucy reiterated.
‘If you truly believe that…’
‘I do.’
Cam sighed deeply, closing his eyes.
‘I will um…. prepare your room for you’ Lucy told him. ‘There is a storage room upstairs. It’s only small but I have a friend. He is a carpenter and he can make a bed very quickly. I will buy a mattress and sheets.’
‘Don’t bother’ Cam told her. ‘Just something basic is fine. I don’t want to put trouble onto you or anyone else.
‘It’s no trouble’ Lucy smiled. ‘I want to do it.’
‘Well if it will make you happy’ Cam replied glumly.
‘It will.’
Cam stared back at her. The smallest smile tweaked his lips.
‘I will be back later’ he told her. ‘If there is anything you want me to do, just let me know.’
‘Could you smile more?’ Lucy asked him. ‘Maybe laugh more?’
‘When there is something to smile about’ Cam replied. ‘When there is something to laugh about.’
He walked out of the home without another word.

He was gone for hours. But when he finally returned, the sun was beginning to set.
‘There you are’ Lucy breathed as he entered the home. ‘Are you alright?’
‘I’m fine’ Cam spoke quietly. ‘I was just walking.’
‘I’m glad to see you back.’
Cam blinked slowly, raising his head to her.
‘Cam…’ Lucy breathed.
She stepped towards him, reaching out to caress his face.
She kissed him then, pressing her lips gently against his.
It was a few seconds before Cam reacted. He raised his metallic hand and pushed her back gently.
‘I can’t’ he breathed, pain in his voice. ‘I just….’
He gritted his teeth.
‘I’m sorry’ she breathed, stepping back away from him. ‘…. I’m sorry.’
Cam said nothing, but watched her silently, reaching his consciousness out to her.

He could feel the sadness welling inside her.
'I…' she uttered. 'Your room is ready.'
She led Cam upstairs through the quiet house, and down the corridor to a small room at the end.
'Here' she said to him, stopping in the doorway and glancing back at Cam. 'It's um…' she paused. 'If there is anything else I can get for you…'
'This is fine' Cam mumbled, standing in the doorway and looking inwards.
'Kanae and Talia are in asleep already' Lucy whispered. 'My room is through that door' she pointed down the corridor.
Cam glanced towards this door, before looking away again.
'If there is anything you want' Lucy spoke quietly. 'Just let me know.'
'I will' Cam spoke in a dismissive tone. 'Thank you. I want to sleep now.'
He stepped into the room then, looking down at the bed before turning and glancing back towards Lucy.
She stood there for a moment, hesitant, before dipping her head.
'Goodnight then' she mumbled, before closing the door quietly, leaving Cam alone in the small room.

Cam turned towards the bed, raising his hand slowly and scratching the left side of his head.
He felt a heavy presence in the home, the emotion of those within, but he felt Lucy's most of all. She was heartbroken.
Cam undressed, placing his clothes neatly on the edge of the bed. He moved over to the mirror at one end of the small room, looking at himself.
He stood there completely naked before the full-length mirror, staring at his bare flesh.
He was a mess.
The scarring from the explosion covered one side of his body, his miss-matched mechanical arms stood out, so unnatural. His broken teeth from the many beatings, had not been fixed as they had been when Brioke beat him, back when he had been given ceramic teeth to replace them. His eyes were pale, one blue, the other milky, and he could only see through one, and his hearing, the ringing in his ears was constant. It never stopped, it never diminished, and he struggled to hear what people said to him most of the time. The right side of his body was scarred, and left side of his body was the side he had lost his arm first, and this was the side, the ear, the worm had burrowed into his head. Cam would twitch and convulse because of this, and often times he was confused. He constantly felt a pain in the left side of his head, an itch sometimes, though the worm had been taken out long ago, he still felt like it was inside his head.
It's the drugs making it worse Cam heard a voice inside his head. *You take these drugs to drown yourself….so that you do not have to feel… but look at what they are doing to you. They are making you more of a broken man than you already are.*
Cam raised his metallic hand, brushing his hair back, his black hair had gotten very long now, he hadn't bothered to cut it in years.
Cam lowered his hand when the sensation passed once more, as it always did.
He looked at himself again hard. He was ugly, repulsive. He remembered the days when he was younger, before he had left through the portal to travel to the other worlds. He had once

been incredibly handsome. Now he wondered if he could face his self in the past, how horrified his younger self would have been, seeing what he would become.
It was truly frightening.

The next morning, they ate breakfast together, like a family.
It felt strange.
'Cam' Lucy said to him. 'Would you be able to take Kanae outside to play today?'
Cam glanced up towards Lucy then, staring at her with his odd eyes, before glancing towards Kanae, who watched him nervously.
'If you think that is a good idea' Cam mumbled.
'He needs to be with his father' Lucy told him.
'As you say' Cam spoke meekly, he glanced towards Kanae then, who caught his gaze, turning away quickly and staring at something across the room.
Cam reached out to him with his magic, feeling the boy's emotion, most of all there was fear within him.
When breakfast was finished, Lucy and Talia cleared away the table quickly and quietly.
'You know where the park is don't you?' Lucy said to Cam.
'I do' Cam grumbled.
Lucy glanced about her then, looking for their son.
'Kanae? Where are you?'
From around the corner in the next room, a head popped out.
'Kanae come over here' Lucy said to the boy, but Kanae instead hid around the corner again.
'Kanae' Lucy spoke sternly now. 'I won't tell you again.'
Kanae glanced around again.
'Come here now.'
He stepped out from around the corner, holding his hands behind his back and staring at the ground.
'You want to go to the park to play, don't you?'
He said nothing.
'Your father is taking you. Now stop being silly and go with him' Lucy scolded.
Kanae raised his head, staring up at his father.
The two stood there, silently observing the other, as Lucy watched her son. Kanae maintained the distance between himself and his parents.
'Come here Kanae' Lucy spoke for the final time.
Kanae padded forwards, doing so very reluctantly.
Lucy turned to Cam as Kanae stopped before them, holding his hands behind his back nervously.
'I will be…staying at home' she finished. 'You can come home whenever you are ready, I um…. I'll be here' she told him, 'cooking.'
'Alright' Cam replied shortly.
He looked down his son.
'Are you coming then?'

Kanae stared up at Cam with wide eyes, glancing towards his mother who frowned at him then, waiting for a response. Kanae suddenly realised this, but instead of talking, he just nodded quickly, not speaking a word.
'Alright' Cam said turning away and heading to the door. 'I'm going.'
'Go on then' Lucy said to Kanae, who lingered where he stood. 'Hurry up.'
Cam waited by the door for Kanae to reach him, holding the door open for him. The boy scurried forwards, pausing as he reached Cam, staring up at him as he passed by. Cam watched the boy closely as he went. He glanced up towards Lucy briefly then, seeing her profile standing there facing him. She was watching him.
Cam turned away without another word, closing the front door after him.
Kanae was standing there a short distance away, watching him.
Cam let out a sigh, approaching the boy before passing him.
'Come on then' he said to Kanae. 'Let's go to the park.'
He walked slowly with his hands in his pockets, glancing around briefly to make sure Kanae was following. He was.
As Cam turned his head to the side, and saw that Kanae was staring at him as they went.
Cam continued to watch the boy for a moment, before looking ahead again. All around them as they passed through the streets, people stared at him. Cam had only been here for a short time, and people found him so strange and foreign. His appearance more than anything else, is what frightened them the most.
Cam continued to walk in silence for a moment, with Kanae by his side, though maintaining a distance between them.
Cam pursed his lips then, glancing back towards Kanae, seeing the boy was still staring at him.
Cam frowned then, turning his head now towards the boy again silently.
Kanae continued to stare.
Cam let out a sigh, facing ahead again, and saying nothing.
They walked slowly for several minutes until they reached the park.
'Ok we're here' Cam said slowing to a stop at the edge of the park, which had a low fence running around.
Cam paused, turning towards Kanae.
'Don't you want to play?' he asked the boy.
Kanae said nothing, but he continued to stare.
'Go on' Cam prompted, becoming a little irritated. 'Go play.'
Kanae turned away from his father at last, moving over towards the low fence and trotting through the gate.
Cam watched mutely as Kanae paused, glancing back at Cam who had not moved, continuing to stand there with his hands in his pockets. Kanae turned away at last, running off towards the centre of the park towards the climbing frame.
Cam took a deep breath, letting out a slow sigh as he stood there like column, watching Kanae's tiny profile from the edge of the park, narrowing his eyes as he struggled to see him. His reached his magic out, feeling everything around him that he could, and watched, remaining where he was.

As other people moved around him, people of the town, many eyes came to rest on Cam, watching him with curiosity and uncertainty. No one approached Cam as he stood there, watching his son play.
Cam blinked slowly, in the scene before him there were several figures. Other children played in the park, watched closely by their parents, either one or both of them, though there were mostly mothers here.
There was a mother pushing her young daughter on the swing, another watching their child climbing the high bars, standing beneath her son ready to catch him if he were to fall. And Kanae, who played with several other children around the park, first he ran to the roundabout, playing on that before going to the swings, and then returning to the climbing frame again.
It was clear he knew many of the other children in this town, many of which were about the same age as him. Cam watched from a distance as Kanae spoke with several of the other mothers, doing so animatedly. He was happy, Cam could feel this.
'It would be a shame if he hurt himself' the masked figure said beside him.
Cam didn't know which figure this was that stood beside him now, but he could tell by the voice, that it was not Vergil, and it was not Wonderland. The figure was masked, hooded in the typical black cloak they so often wore, even wearing gloves to cover the flesh of their hands. Nothing of them could be seen, not even their eyes through the windows of their plague masks.
'You'd better not do anything to hurt my son' Cam spoke seriously to the figure.
'I would never do that' the figure replied swiftly, turning away again and looking towards Kanae as he continued to play. 'None of us would ever do anything to hurt your son. We know he is precious.'
Cam looked towards Kanae.
'I am just saying' the nameless masked figure spoke, 'children so often hurt themselves, running around like that.' He paused. 'It's only a matter of time.'
Cam blinked slowly, turning his head very slowly towards the figure again, before looking back towards the boy.
The masked figure vanished moments later, leaving Cam once more. Cam did not even notice the figure go.
He tensed then as he heard Kanae begin to cry.
The masked figure had been right. Kanae had tripped and hurt himself.
Cam sneered in annoyance then, angry at the masked figures. He had not believed they had done this, but it annoyed him all the same.
He stepped through the gate, striding towards Kanae as a young woman, a mother to one of the other children, knelt beside him to see if he was ok, speaking to him softly.
She glanced up nervously as Cam approached, rising and backing swiftly away, she was frightened by him.
Cam did not even have to reach his magic out to her to feel this. It was clear.
He reached Kanae then, who upon sight of him quickly fell silent, staring up with wide and teary eyes.
Cam knelt before him, pausing for a moment before taking Kanae by the leg.
Kanae rasped then uncomfortably, drawing a sharp intake of breath as Cam's metallic hand touched his skin.

‘Cold’ he rasped.
‘I know’ Cam mumbled.
He looked at Kanae’s leg.
‘It’s just a graze.’
‘It hurts’ Kanae whimpered.
‘You’ll be fine’ Cam replied rising to his feet again.
Kanae began to cry openly then, sobbing into his hands.
Cam tensed, standing uncomfortably over him, not sure what to do. He was aware now of people around him watching him. They had stopped what they were doing to stare.
‘What can I do to make it better?’ Cam asked the boy. But Kanae didn’t answer, instead continued to cry.
Cam stared down at him for a moment nervously, thinking.
He swallowed the lump in his throat.
‘Gods I’m not cut out for this’ he mumbled, before kneeling again and lifting Kanae in his arms, resting him on his hip as he turned, striding away from the park and heading back home.
Kanae who had stopped crying suddenly out of surprise, began to sob again.
Cam ignored him as he carried him back to Lucy.

He entered the kitchen, and Lucy and Talia were there in an instant, hearing Kanae cry.
‘What did you do to him?’ Talia snapped before she could think.
‘Nothing’ Cam growled angrily back, causing her to shrink away from him.
Lucy hesitated, hands reached out towards Kanae but not taking him from Cam.
‘He just fell’ Cam said to Lucy, speaking in a softer tone as he turned to her. ‘I didn’t know what to do…...he wouldn’t stop crying so I brought him back.’
Lucy took Kanae from him then, placing the boy on the kitchen counter and pushing the food out the way to give him space.
‘What did you do Kanae?’ Lucy asked him.
Through his sobs and his crying, Lucy was just about able to make out his words. He told her he had been running too fast and fell.
Lucy lifted his trouser leg, seeing his knee grazed. His elbows also were bleeding.
‘Children hurt themselves so easily’ Lucy mumbled as she reached for the draw beside her. ‘He’s always hurting himself but never learns from his mistakes’ she said to no one in particular.
Talia approached to comfort Kanae as he continued to sob. Cam stepped forwards, using his magic to close the front door quietly behind him as he went.
‘I’m sorry about this’ Lucy was saying to Cam as Talia continued to watch him suspiciously, though Cam ignored Talia. ‘The boy has no sense of safety, he’s so reckless and never listens to advice. I tell him not to do things because it’s dangerous but he never listens.’
Kanae began to cry louder now as Lucy pressed a gauze to the wound.
‘It stings’ Kanae screamed.
‘Oh stop, it’s not that bad’ Lucy snapped angrily.
‘Lucy please calm down’ Talia said calmly to her, placing a hand upon her shoulder.

Kanae began to scream and cry and kick now, throwing a tantrum for no reason. Lucy threw the gauze down in frustration, turning away sharply with her hands clawing at her head.
'Get him out of here' she snapped, '*please*.'
'I'll run a bath for him' Talia said, taking the boy in her arms and carrying him away quickly, heading upstairs.
Cam watched her go, before turning silently towards Lucy, who leant back against the counter, breathing slowly, shuddering slightly.
'Why are you so stressed?' he asked her calmly.
Lucy let out another breath, before lifting her head again.
'This is just so hard for me' she whispered, fighting back tears. 'I don't know if I can handle all of this.'
Cam said nothing.
'He's such a spoilt boy' Lucy whispered, not trusting her voice to speak. 'I don't know how I could handle him sometimes if…...if Talia…...' she gritted her teeth. 'I try but…. gods I'm just a mess….'
Cam blinked slowly, turning away.
'Is there anything I can do to make things better?' he asked her.
'You haven't done anything wrong' Lucy replied.
'I'm sorry I let him fall.'
'It's not your fault. You can't stop him from running.'

Days later

Kanae was running in the garden with his arms open, pretending to be a bird.
Cam stepped forwards, narrowing his eyes as the boy ran past him.
'Kanae' Cam spoke loudly and clearly, and the boy stopped suddenly.
Kanae turned to face him then, arms dropping to his sides.
'Yes daddy?'
Cam felt a strange twinge inside him at this. He spoke.
'Have you not learned your lesson?'
'Lesson?'
'You were being reckless the other day. You fell and hurt yourself remember? Do you want that to happen again?'
Kanae frowned at him, staring away as if thinking about this.
'No' he said at last. 'It was not fun.'
'Of course it wasn't' Cam said in a flat voice. 'You make your mother worry when you act this way, it's dangerous.'
'If you say so father.'
Cam gritted his teeth in annoyance, somehow he felt that Kanae was not taking him seriously.
'I want to climb that tree' Kanae voiced suddenly, pointing to a tree further down the garden.

Cam narrowed his eyes at the tree, trying to see it clearer.
‘Does your mother usually let you climb trees?’ Cam asked.
‘Yes.’
‘Are you lying?’
‘No?’
Cam let out a sigh, turning to look back at the house. But Lucy was not there, neither was Talia. They had left earlier together to visit the market. Cam had been left home to look after his son.
Cam looked back to him.
He could only see the boys profile, not his facial feature at all, his eyes, it was still difficult to see the world.
‘Even with my good eye’ Cam muttered, lifting his hand to his blue eye. ‘Dammit.’
‘I want to climb the tree!’ Kanae said stubbornly.
Cam lowered his hand again, considering his son.
‘Will that make you happy?’ he asked the boy.
‘Yes yes’ Kanae gleamed excitedly, bouncing up and down.
Cam stepped towards his son.
Kanae reached his hands up to Cam as he approached. Cam lifted his son, holding him with his metallic arms. He could not feel the boy’s touch, could not feel his skin. He missed being able to touch, to feel. It pained him, it was not something he had ever thought of before he had lost his arms, but it hurt how much he missed it, and this plagued him every single day.
‘Hurry hurry’ Kanae said as Cam held him close.
‘Don’t fidget’ Cam told him. ‘I might drop you.’
He approached the tree, helping Kanae to climb onto the lower branch.
‘It would be fun if we could build a treehouse’ Kanae said, clambering awkwardly onto the next branch up.
Hearing these words, Cam remembered suddenly ‘Auntie’, the woman he had come to love when he was a child, he had loved her like a mother.
‘Be careful please’ Cam said patiently. Watching Kanae climbing higher.
‘Can we build a treehouse in this tree?’ Kanae asked him.
‘It would certainly make it safer for you I think’ Cam mumbled in response, brushing leaves out of his long dark hair as they began to fall overhead.
‘Have you made a treehouse before?’
‘Don’t talk and climb at the same time’ Cam told him. ‘You will get distracted. Then you’ll fall and hurt yourself. You don’t want that again, do you?’
‘No daddy.’
Cam moved around the tree, staring upwards.
Kanae climbed eagerly. He seemed to be having fun.
‘Kanae, don’t climb to high.’
‘I’m not.’
‘Yes you are I can see.’
‘I thought mother said you could not see.’
‘I’m not completely blind.’
‘I’m not anywhere near the top yet.’

Cam blinked slowly.
His feet left the ground then, as he levitated through the air, ascending slowly.
Kanae stared at him wide eyed as he did this, not believing what he saw.
Cam reached out to Kanae then, taking him in his arms and lifting him from the branch of the tree.
Cam descended again carefilly, touching the ground and putting Kanae down.
'Don't do that' Cam said to him. 'It's my job to keep you safe, so don't climb too high.'
'If I fell would you catch me?' Kanae asked him.
'Yes. I would protect you, I would do anything to protect you.'
'You have magic?' Kanae asked.
'Yes.'
'Do I have magic?'
Cam stared at him, his eyes widened slowly.
He swallowed then. It was something he had never considered before.
'I want to get back in the tree' Kanae said eagerly, turning and hugging the large trunk and jumping up and down excitedly. 'Please let me climb!'
'If you climb too high, I will bring you back down ok?'
'Yeah yeah' Kanae said, in a tone that suggested he was hardly listening. 'Let me up please.'
Cam stepped forwards and lifted him, holding him up so he could climb back onto the lower branch, making his way upwards again.
'Be careful' Cam spoke clearly. 'I don't want you to hurt yourself. How would I explain that to your mother?'
'She will understand.'
'I don't think so.'
'I won't hurt myself' Kanae said, 'I'm careful.'
'We both know that is not true.'
Kanae looked down at him, giving him a cheesy grin.
The boy looked up again, moving along the branch this time, instead of moving upwards.
Cam continued to stare up at him, tilting his head, rubbing the back of his neck, beginning to feel physically uncomfortable staring upwards all the time.
I hope this does not upset Lucy.
Cam felt a strange emotion suddenly, it was fear, but it did not come from him or Kanae, but somewhere close.
It was a mild fear, but as Cam looked ahead of him, the sensation increased slightly.
'Is there someone there?'
Kanae in the tree above him stopped what he was doing, glancing down through the branches to see what was happening.
'Hey Jenny!' Kanae called out. 'Is that you?'
Cam stared ahead for a moment, before looking up again as Kanae made his way quickly down the tree, doing so fast enough that he fell. But Cam caught him with ease, using his magic in the air around the boy's body, he descended his body gently to the ground.
Kanae straightened, staring up at his father with wide eyes, a little startled. He turned away to face the tree now.
'Come out Jenny, there's nothing to be afraid of, my father won't hurt you.'

Cam stared at the base of the tree, seeing as a young girl stepped out, a little older than Kanae.
‘Is he really your dad?’ she asked. ‘He looks weird.’
Cam said nothing.
‘Yeah he’s my dad’ Kanae replied. ‘And yeah, he does look kinda weird.’
Cam glanced down at him with tired eyes.
‘Come and see him’ Kanae said to the girl, beaconing her over. ‘He won’t hurt you I promise.’
‘Why does he look so different?’ Jenny asked tentatively, approaching Cam and staring up at him with caution.
‘He just does, I don’t why.’ Kanae looked back up at Cam with a smile. ‘I think he looks really cool.’
‘Why are his arms like that?’ Jenny asked.
‘I don’t know’ Kanae replied, ‘but I think they’re really cool, I wish I had arms like that.’
Cam continued to stare at Kanae flatly.
‘Can I see your arms?’ Jenny asked shyly, standing with her hands behind her back and gazing up at Cam with wide eyes.
Cam knelt, holding both his arms outwards to her.
‘Woah’ the girl breathed in awe, reaching out and touching his arms, running her fingers upwards towards his shoulders, then down to his hands. ‘I’ve never seen anything like it before.’
‘That’s because it does not exist’ Cam replied.
Jenny drew sharply back then, speaking to him almost in an accusing manner.
‘Is it true you can do magic?’ Jenny asked him. ‘I have heard stories. Some people say it’s true, others say it’s just made up.’
‘I can use magic’ Cam replied in a monotone.
‘Then why don’t you use it?’
‘I only use it if I have a reason to.’
Jenny made a face at him, pouting sullenly at his response.
‘I should get going’ she told Kanae quietly, kicking her feet and staring at the ground. ‘I’ll see you later Kanae’ she said turning and running away. ‘Goodbye!’
She was gone, disappearing through a gap in the fence. Cam rose to his feet then, watching the girl run away, until she was lost to his sight.
‘She’s my friend’ Kanae told his father. ‘We play together sometimes.’
Kanae looked past Cam then, suddenly calling out.
‘Mother!’
Kanae ran to her then, and Cam turned, seeing a figure standing at the door of the home, recognising Lucy by her orange hair.
She was smiling as Kanae ran up to her. She picked him up in her arms, kissing him on the cheek and holding him close.
‘I missed you Kanae.’
‘I missed you too mother.’
‘Have you been playing and having fun?’
‘Yeah’ Kanae said wrapping his arms around his mother’s neck. ‘We were climbing the tree.’

Lucy raised her head, glancing towards the bottom of the small garden, where Cam still stood by the tree.
Their eyes met, and they held each other's gaze for a moment, before Lucy put Kanae back down again.
'Go inside now' Lucy said, 'your auntie is preparing dinner, why don't you help her?'
'Ok' Kanae grinned, trotting past her then and jogging into the house. He was always so full of energy, running all the time, playing all the time. He was a happy child.
Lucy turned back to Cam.
Cam let out a sigh, stepping forwards, he made his way towards her.
He stopped before her, gazing into her eyes as she stared back at him.

That night, Cam waited until Kanae was put to bed, waited for him to fall asleep, for the house to fall silent, before stepping outside.
He walked through the silent place, heading towards the fields beyond, clinging to the shadows where none would see him.
'There you are.'
Cam narrowed his eyes in the dark, seeing a silhouette. Of course, there were certain people that it was not so easy to hide from. Stepping closer he recognised the familiar plague mask.
Vergil lifted his hand removing the mask from his face.
'Have you been watching me?' Cam asked him, already knowing the answer.
'Yes' Vergil answered shortly.
Cam turned away, in the dark of the night, he could hardly see anything around him at all, though the moon shone clearly above, surrounded by shining stars.
'You know there are hundreds of billions of stars in the cosmos' Vergil told him, tilting his head back to gaze at the heavens. 'Some of them are so far away, it takes literally years for their light to reach us.'
Cam raised his hand, rubbing at his eyes. The metal of his hand was cold and sharp.
'What do you think of this?' Cam said to Vergil.
'You are referring to what your son said about possibly having inherited powers from you?' Vergil queried. 'We are not sure what to make of it ourselves. The truth is that we don't know.'
Cam stared off into the night, seeing nothing.
'I don't know how I should be feeling about this' Cam uttered, 'what I'm supposed to be feeling about this. But I feel…. more than anything else…what I feel…is fear.'
'Would it be so bad if your son carried the same magic as you?' Vergil asked him.
'I don't know' Cam grumbled. 'I don't want him to. I…. I don't want him to hold the same powers as I do, or any at all.'
'Why not?'
'I want him to be a normal child' Cam spoke firmly. 'I don't want him to have these powers.'
'Why not?' Vergil asked him again. 'Something good might come of it.'
'No' Cam shook his head angrily. 'No. All my powers ever brought me were pain and suffering.'

‘That was different’ Vergil said to him. ‘You were born a prince, you were born into a certain position, with certain expectations. You suffered certain happenings. The death of your father…no…even before that. The fact that your mother was sold like cattle into a marriage and forced to bear children she did not want. If you had a mother that loved you, that actually *wanted* you… then you would never had escaped the palace and met the person you knew as *Auntie*, and seen what happened that day, that thing that traumatised you, that made you weak, made you an easy target, an easy victim…. for Brioke…’
Cam buried his head in his hands, sobbing then.
‘Your misfortunes were because of a series of unfortunate circumstance, and while yes your magic has caused you greater suffering, it is not the main cause of it. It is not the root. No. That would be the council.’
‘I want my son to have a good life’ Cam hissed through gritted teeth. ‘I don’t want him to suffer…I just…oh gods…. I didn’t even know I had a son until recently, I…love him…. I didn’t realise it until now but…the thought of him being in danger or suffering…. oh no please don’t let this be happening.’
Cam jumped slightly as he felt a touch on his shoulder. Vergil had approached him, Cam had not heard, all he heard now, was the ringing still in his ears.
‘We don’t even know if he has any magic in his body at all’ Vergil said to Cam. ‘We don’t know much about your magic, we don’t know if it can be passed onto children, or if it stays in the individual. You are an exception, we have never seen any being like you. A WeatherMaker. You are the first of your kind.’
‘The first of my kind…’ Cam mumbled, lifting his head, tears streaked his cheeks. ‘As if I have not suffered enough…’

The next morning Cam waited in the kitchen of Lucy’s home, feeling a little nervous. He had hardly slept that night, and felt so tired, so drained. He rubbed at his eyes with his cold hands, his mind felt so heavy.
‘Cam?’
Cam straightened then, looking about the room for the source the noise had come from.
‘Oh…Lucy’ he mumbled, seeing her orange hair. ‘How are you?’
‘Did you not sleep?’ Lucy asked him, moving closer to Cam as he sat at the kitchen table silently.
‘Um…a little. I couldn’t really, it’s just…’ he let out a slow breath. ‘I’ve still got a lot on my mind.’
‘Anything you want to talk about?’ Lucy asked.
‘No’ Cam shook his head.
She stared at him, her expression sad.
‘Lucy’ Cam spoke carefully. ‘I….’ he closed his mouth then, feeling a lump in his throat. He swallowed, forcing himself to speak. ‘I…spoke to someone last night. A masked figure…’
‘You mean the plague masked figures?’ she asked him tiredly.
‘You know about them?’ Cam uttered. ‘I guess I shouldn’t be too surprised.’ He swallowed nervously again. ‘I…. should tell you something’ he began reluctantly. ‘It was something I

should have realised before but…. I just…it didn't occur to me…and I hate myself for it. I hate myself for…being so…for not thinking of it. I should have realised this sooner but…'
'What is it?' Lucy asked in a monotone.
'I have magic within me' Cam said to her. 'You know that don't you.'
'Yes.'
'I worry now that, I may have passed my magic onto Kanae…' he put his elbows on the table suddenly, head in his hands. 'I just…I didn't even know I had a son. I fear now that…. I have done this.'
'I don't understand' Lucy replied flatly. 'Why would you fear something like this?'
'My powers have brought me nothing but misery' Cam said, hissing through gritted teeth. 'If I could go back and change…. ah' he breathed. 'I never wanted any of this.'
'I never wanted a lot of things that happened' Lucy replied. 'But they did.'
Cam closed his eyes in anguish then, remembering that Lucy had lost nearly her entire family, and she had been there to see them die.
'I didn't mean…'
He flinched slightly as Lucy touched his shoulder, having not heard her step closer. He let out a sigh, relaxing again.
'I'm sorry' Cam breathed. 'I shouldn't be thinking this way.'
'I already thought this' Lucy said to him, 'that Kanae may have inherited some of his father's magic. And it does not scare me.'
Cam looked up at Lucy with pleading eyes. He was hurting inside.
'I don't fear your magic like you fear your own magic' she said to him. 'If Kanae does have magic…well…that would not change him, at least not in my eyes.'
Cam stared at her in disbelief, before looking away again sadly
'Someone is coming to see him today' Cam mumbled, talking to his hands as he rested them on the table before him.
'Who?' Lucy asked.
'Just a friend' Cam said dismissively. 'Just…one of the masked figures' he finished. 'Just to have a look at him, to see if he does have any magic in his body. They won't hurt him. I swear.'
Lucy let out a sigh. 'Alright' she said. 'When will they come?'
'I don't know' Cam mumbled. 'Soon I think. Sometime this morning.'

I was shortly after this conversation, that the figure arrived.
Wonderland grinned, giving a twirl. Her wings were hidden now, no one would have suspected what she really was, a fairy in disguise.
'Don't I look so beautiful? I rather like this form'
'Do you like playing games then?' Cam asked her flatly as they stood together outside, Lucy and Kanae beside him.
'Oh Cam' she spoke in a disapproving tone, 'why do you have to go and make me sound bad by saying things like that? I'm trying to help you you know? This is for your benefit.'
Cam unfolded his arms, turning to glance down at Kanae who stood before his mother beside him, looking a little nervous.
'Isn't he cute!?' Wonderland gushed then. 'This is him yes?'

‘Yes’ Cam mumbled. ‘This is my son.’
‘He’s beautiful…’ Wonderland smiled down at the boy. ‘He does look like you, you know?’
She glanced towards Cam, who stared back at her with a flat expression, blinking slowly.
‘You’ she said to Cam. ‘I’ve seen pictures of you as a boy. You were so cute.’
‘Are you….’ Cam sighed, ‘going to get to the point?’
‘The point?’
Cam glanced down at Kanae, who stood there holding his hands to his chest, glancing up at them with nervous eyes, shifting on the spot uncomfortably.
Cam looked back towards the fairy Wonderland.
‘Does he…. I mean….is he like me?’
‘You mean does he have magic?’ Wonderland clarified. ‘Yes’ she beamed.
‘What?’ Cam gasped in shock. ‘How do you….how do you know I mean…you’ve not done anything?’
‘I can sense it’ Wonderland beamed, holding her hands behind her back and smiling. ‘Just like you. I can just feel it, I don’t have to do anything.’ She grinned happily at Cam.
Cam stared at Wonderland in shock, turning to Lucy then.
‘Can we have a moment alone?’
Lucy took Kanae’s hand, walking away with him.
Cam watched them go, before turning back to Wonderland.
He was, silent for the longest time, as Wonderland watched him expectantly, not speaking, instead maintaining the silence, and continuing to smile.
‘When will it show?’ Cam asked sadly, speaking at last.
‘I couldn’t say. Your magic did not show itself until you were much older, nearly twenty I think…’ she trailed off. ‘It was always in your body, lying dormant. It was released because of intense stress and trauma on your mind and body. Something that had been festering inside of you for years, pain, anguish, sadness, hatred and frustration. All the wrong emotions. Everything negative.’
Cam turned away.
‘It may be different for him’ Wonderland said. ‘I sense magic within his body but…he may be different to you. We don’t even know if his magic is the same as yours. Magic is a fascinating thing, but it is very complicated. It is unlikely he will be as strong as you, but very likely that the magic will release in his body as he grows, but it will not be for many years. So, for now, you don’t have to worry.’
‘What will happen?’ Cam asked him. ‘What will happen in the future when his magic shows itself?’
‘Who could say’ Wonderland replied with a shrug, showing her hands. ‘I for one cannot wait.’ She gleamed, her eyes flashing wildly, excitement burning bright within her. ‘It’s going to be wonderful. Don’t you think? Father and son…’ she giggled then. ‘You could take over other worlds, once you have conquered your own…. once you eventually decide to march onto the capital and the palace. They are waiting for you, you know’ she grinned at him teasingly. ‘What remains of the council. They know of your existence. And your beloved brother and the others. Oh, I just realised’ Wonderland gasped, ‘your brother would love you meet your son. Won’t that be exciting?’
Cam laughed humourlessly to himself then, hand going to his head.

‘I didn’t even think of that. But yes, you are right…my brother will meet my son….one day.’ He laughed to himself again, eyes distant. ‘That will be a strange meeting indeed.’
‘For now, you don’t have to worry about that’ Wonderland said to him. ‘You stay here with your family. March on the palace when you are ready, but remember, people are suffering while you wait.’
Cam’s brow furrowed ever so slightly.
‘And regarding your son?’ Wonderland continued, ‘he does have magic within his body, a great deal of it, but not nearly as much as you hold. But either way, his magic will not show itself for many years, not until he begins to mature, not until his teens most likely, as was the case for you.’
‘I would rather he did not have powers at all’ Cam grumbled. ‘This only complicates things.’
‘I think it’s exciting. The first of his kind, passes his magic onto his son.’ Wonderland frowned then.
‘What is it?’ Cam asked.
‘It is possible’ Wonderland spoke slowly, ‘to pass existing magic from one being to another.’
‘It is?’ Cam raised his head, feeling suddenly hopeful.
‘Well, it depends on the specific individual of course’ she went on, ‘it may not be possible, but it is still not impossible. It may be that we can take his powers away from him and pass them onto another. But that is something to consider for another day.’
‘You can really do that?’ Cam mumbled.
‘Oh yes’ Wonderland gleamed. ‘Maybe. Probably. Maybe. It would be far easier a process if the participant is willing of course but…. whatever’ she shrugged. ‘Why? Is that something you would be interested in doing? I would not recommend making that kind of decision for someone else. The magic is a part of him, and to take it away…. well’ she trailed off. ‘Imagine cutting the wings off a bird.’
Cam looked away.
‘In any case’ Wonderland said grinning brightly again. ‘You have time to think about it still, and to consider your options, whatever you decided to do in the end.’
‘Right.’ Cam gritted his teeth then, grimacing. ‘Thank you for your help’ he said, balling his fists and hunching his shoulders.
‘Are you dismissing me?’
‘I have things to do. I need to think and be alone.’
‘You trust me, don’t you?’ Wonderland asked him then.
‘What? What do you mean?’
‘I have a strange sort of attachment to you’ Wonderland mumbled to him. ‘I cannot explain why…but I am attracted to your magic. I…feel a strong desire to protect you, and I don’t know why…its strange…I’ve never felt this way before……’
Cam stared at her, holding her gaze for a few moments, before simply walking away.
Wonderland watched him with amusement, a twinkle in her eyes.
‘What *are* you exactly?’ she spoke to the air as she watched him go. ‘Such a curious thing. So interesting to me.’ She hummed to herself, smiling then. ‘WeatherMaker’ she breathed. ‘So wonderful…’

The next day.

‘Kanae, what have I told you about climbing?’ Cam scolded.
‘I’m perfectly safe’ Kanae said to him, clambering higher up the statue. ‘I have you to protect me.’
They were outside the temple now, and Kanae was playing on one of the statues built within the wall itself. A large statue of the god Faeroe, with his fox-like ears and lizard-tail.
‘And what if I am not here?’ Cam said to the boy.
‘Then I would not climb’ Kanae said to his father.
Cam blinked slowly.
‘I don’t believe you.’
Kanae let out a cry of surprise then as he was lifted in the air slowly, away from the statue. He was lowered gently to the ground, his feet touching down softly onto the earth.
Kanae turned sulkily towards his father.
‘That’s not fair!’ he protested.
‘Don’t raise your voice to me’ Cam told him quietly.
Kanae instantly averted his eyes, looking to the floor.
‘You can find safer places to play’ Cam told him.
‘But I like to climb to high places’ Kanae told him. ‘And besides I’m safe with you around.’
‘You should not depend on me like that. You should not depend on anyone like that.’
Kanae ran past him then and to his mother who was approaching them. Cam only spotted her when he turned around.
‘There you are’ she said, picking Kanae up in her arms. ‘I was wondering where you two had gotten to.’
‘Kanae likes to wander around’ Cam spoke in a flat voice.
‘Yeah’ Lucy smiled at him, ‘you’ve learnt that now.’
Cam turned away silently.
‘I came to find you because…’ Lucy trailed off.
‘What is it?’ Cam asked her. ‘Is everything alright?’
‘Yes’ Lucy said hastily, ‘everything is fine.’
‘Then what’s wrong?’
‘Um.’ Lucy swallowed nervously. ‘One of the masked figures has turned up at home’ she said to him. ‘She was asking for you and…’ Lucy pursed her lips. ‘She says her name is Wonderland and that she wants to speak to you. There is a second figure there also, a man called Vergil. He is injured.’
Cam tilted his head at her then, eyes narrowing as he struggled to see her. The day was bright around them.
‘Vergil is injured?’
‘He says he wants to see you. He has been poisoned. Or so he says’ Lucy mumbled.
Cam hesitated.
‘I’ll go to see them’ he said after a time. ‘Will you and Kanae be going to the park together?’
‘You want us out the way’ Lucy said. ‘I know. It’s ok, I understand.’ She smiled down at Kanae as she held him in her arms. ‘We’ll be gone a while. You talk to your friends, or whoever they are. Kanae and I will be back later.’

‘Thank you’ Cam whispered.
Lucy turned and walked away then without pause, carrying Kanae with her, who stared at Cam over his mother’s shoulder as they went.
Cam watched them with uncertainty as they went, turning away and facing the direction of the home.
He narrowed his eyes, blinking slowly. Everything around him was blurred.
Dammit my eyes, why can’t I see clearly still?
He raised his hand, touching near his blue eye for a moment, before allowing his hand to drop.
Curse everything.
Cam moved forwards, heading back home.

He entered the kitchen, closing the door behind him with a snap.
Instantly he saw the figure sitting on the kitchen counter, narrowing his eyes to try to see the figure clearly and tilting his head.
‘Wonderland?’
She giggled at him, lifting her fairy wings so that they could be clearly seen.
‘Hello Cam’ she beamed at him. ‘I’m so glad to see you.’
‘Where is Vergil?’ he asked instantly.
‘In your room. He’s waiting for you.’
Cam marched past her swiftly then, heading upstairs to the room he slept.
He opened the door, to see Vergil lying on the bed, resting on his side with his back to him.
Cam approached, reaching out and touching his shoulder.
Vergil opened his eyes, turning his head around.
‘Cam’ he rasped with a smile, ‘it’s you.’
Cam leant over him, holding his face in his hands.
‘Ah’ Vergil gasped at his touch. ‘It’s cold.’
‘You look awful’ Cam spoke in a low voice. ‘What happened to you?’
Vergil stared up at him, still lying on his side, head turned towards him. His skin was pale. His eyes were bloodshot red, and his body was trembling slightly.
‘Oh’ he breathed. ‘I don’t know if I have time nor the words to tell you.’
‘Are you going to die?’
Vergil stared up at Cam in silence, for a time he didn’t speak.
‘I don’t know’ Vergil admitted. ‘This poison…it is already absorbed into my body. I don’t know if I will make it.’
Cam grimaced then, tears shimmering in his eyes.
‘Oh Vergil’ Cam whimpered. ‘What am I going to do without you?’
‘I may yet live’ Vergil said, ‘there is nothing more I can do for myself. I just have to wait and see if….’ He let out a sigh, the edges of his lips tweaked in a smile. ‘I have done everything I can to save myself and combat this’ he spoke in a whisper. ‘Now I just have to wait.’
Cam bowed his head then, his face, expressionless.
‘What are your chances?’ Cam asked.

‘Fifty-fifty’ Vergil whispered. ‘I just…if I were to die…’ he smiled then, looking up at Cam. ‘I would want to see your face one last time…’

Cam left him alone then, moving back downstairs to find Wonderland still sitting on the counter.
‘So much has been happening’ Wonderland was saying a short time later, ‘in one of the other worlds I mean. Things have been getting really complicated.’
‘I see’ Cam grumbled.
He was sitting at the kitchen table now, leaning forwards on his elbows, hands held together. His mind was fraught with worry and fear that Vergil might die.
‘It was just bad luck really what has happened’ Wonderland continued, slowly bowing her fairy wings. ‘He just let his guard down for one moment and…someone who was really quick, just grabbed an opportunity…. you know?’
Cam raised his head to her, straightening slightly.
‘Your wings are so interesting’ he spoke in a low tone, almost as if he were speaking to himself. ‘So…so interesting.’
He looked away again.
‘I don’t know if Vergil is going to die’ Wonderland spoke casually. ‘But if I does, then I have already found a replacement for him. As you know, there must always be eight of us.’
‘Already found a replacement?’ Cam mumbled, staring at the table with eyes out of focus. ‘That is tasteless.’
‘It’s you’ Wonderland said, leaning back on the counter and grinning up at him playfully. ‘You would replace Vergil if he were to die.’
It took several moments for Cam to process what she was saying.
‘Me?’ he murmured.
‘Yes?’ Wonderland gleamed teasingly. ‘You would be perfect for the role. Every single other person who lives in our world agrees.’ She folded her arms then, nodding her head. ‘It’s very rare that happens… that we all agree on something I mean. Especially on something like this.’
‘Is that so?’ Cam said flatly. He grimaced then. ‘I am not interested in that’ Cam said to her, ‘I am not interested in any of that, as I have already told you.’
‘But if Vergil dies’ Wonderland said to him innocently, ‘then you would take his place, as is his final wish.’
‘His final wish?’
‘Yes.’
‘I have things to do in this world’ Cam answered.
‘Things so important you are still hanging around here instead of fixing your own kingdom’ Wonderland answered promptly.
Cam said nothing.
‘You have time’ Wonderland pressed. ‘You could live forever if you wanted.’
‘Nothing lives forever.’
Wonderland giggled then, lying on her front on the counter now, kicking her feet happily and bowing her wings.

‘You would make a wonderful addition to our strange little family….. or whatever we are’ Wonderland told him happily.
Cam dipped his head slowly but said nothing.
‘You would surely not refuse Vergil’s dying wish’ Wonderland said to him, her expression turning serious then.
‘It may not come to that’ Cam said to her. ‘I believe Vergil will live, he said that he might live, and I think he will.’
‘What will you do if he doesn’t make it?’ Wonderland asked.
‘It will break my heart…’
‘Oh, this is so exciting’ Wonderland grinned widely, looking incredibly happy as she stretched out cat-like on the counter. ‘This whole story now hinges on Vergil’s survival. If he dies…. if he lives…. this story has the potential to fork into two completely different way.’ She rested her head on her arms as she watched Cam joyfully, eyes twinkling brightly. ‘I wonder what will happen’ she spoke.

The next morning, Cam woke.
Lucy and Kanae and Talia slept upstairs, Cam slept downstairs, because Vergil was in his bed.
It was the bright morning light shining through the window that had woken him.
Cam sat up quickly, leaning back on the sofa and staring at his lap.
He rubbed his face quickly then to wake himself. His hands cold.
Cam turned and glanced towards the stairs, rising then he moved quickly across the room, ascending the stairs and heading towards his own room where Vergil had stayed that night.
Behind him, unseen by Cam, Wonderland watched him silently.
Cam marched down the corridor. He opened the door and stepped into the room without a pause.
His heart stopped in his chest as he stared, letting go of the handle before closing the door behind him and turning back to Vergil.
He sat on the edge of the bed, reaching out to touching Vergil’s face. He touched his skin, but could feel nothing, with his mechanical arms.
‘Vergil?’
Vergil opened his eyes then and smiled.
‘Ca…..Cam’ he groaned, grimacing in pain.
‘How do you feel?’
Vergil let out a sigh then, his eyes growing distant.
‘Alive.’

Cam helped Vergil sit up, putting his arm around him and lifting him carefully, and he helped him to stand.
‘Ah’ Vergil doubled over then, holding himself.
‘Are you alright?’
‘Yeah’ he gasped, rubbing at his belly. ‘I…it still hurts a little.’

Cam watched him with concern, as Vergil's body relaxed slightly, and he raised his head with a smile.
'I'm ok…I'll be ok' Vergil breathed, pulling his shoulders back and taking his arm away from Cam. 'I will be ok to walk by myself.'
Cam stared at Vergil with wide eyes, watching as Vergil very carefully rose to his feet, wobbling slightly.
Cam had his arms stretched out then, ready to catch Vergil if he were to fall. But Vergil had managed to steady himself.
'Ah…' he let out a long sigh. 'I feel slightly better already. My brain and stomach don't feel like they're being stepped on anymore. And that feels good.'
They left the room together, moving slowly along the corridor.
Vergil let out a cry of pain suddenly, hugging himself.
Cam reached out to him with worry.
Vergil began to chuckle.
'Oh, that hurts' he gasped. 'I just with it would all go away…'
'You'll be ok now won't you?' Cam asked him. 'You're not going to die?'
'No' Vergil hissed through his teeth. 'I'm not going to die, not now. If it was going to kill me, it would have done so by now but…it will still take a while to get out of my system. It's still agony.'
'You'll get over it' Cam told him. 'I've felt far worse.'
Vergil slowly turned to face him with a faint smile.
'I'm glad' Cam sighed. 'I don't know what I would do if I lost you.'
'Would you be sad?' Vergil asked.
'Of course I would be. I love you.'
Vergil began to chuckle then. 'If one of us had to die, I would rather it be me.'
'And let me suffer the loss?' Cam said to him. 'I would rather die. It would not be much of a loss that were to happen.'
'Cam' Vergil said speaking seriously. 'I would be devastated.'
'Let's not talk of this anymore. You're going to be alright, just rest and concentrate on becoming stronger. That is all you need to do.'
Vergil smiled. 'I am rather hungry' he said.
'Yeah' Cam said nodding. 'Ok.'

Cam helped support Vergil as they headed down the stairs, walking slowly, taking each step at a time carefully, and all the while, Cam was holding onto Vergil's arm.
'I like this house' Vergil spoke then. 'It's nice.'
'Just concentrate on walking' Cam said to Vergil quietly.
'Alright' Vergil breathed, head bowed as he stared at his feet.
They reached the bottom of the stairs eventually, and Cam let go of Vergil, still reaching out to him in case he was to fall.
'Thanks' Vergil smiled.
'Morning guys' came a cheery voice, and Cam and Vergil glanced up, seeing Wonderland waving to them from across the room.
'Wonderland' Vergil spoke flatly. 'I should have known you would be here.'

She didn't reply, only gleamed at him, her fairy wings bowing slowly. They looked beautiful, shining in the morning light that came through the kitchen window, they glistened like a blanket of snow.
'You should put those away' Vergil said to her. 'I can hear movement upstairs. It would be better if they didn't see.'
Cam turned to look back upstairs, hearing nothing but the ringing in his ears. He turned back to face Wonderland, seeing faint movement behind her as she folded her wings, hiding them away again. They vanished from sight. Anyone who saw her now, would never had a clue as to what she really was.
'Ah' Wonderland exclaimed suddenly, seeing a figure at the top of the stairs then. 'It's your son Cam.'
Cam glanced around to the top of the stairs, but saw no one there.
'Come out Kanae' Cam spoke clearly. 'You should not hide like that.'
After a few moments of silence, a figure peered around the corner.
'Oh its so cute how he always does that' Wonderland squealed happily, balling her fists.
'Come out Kanae' Cam said to him, and Kanae stepped out from around the corner, standing at the top of the stairs with his hands behind his back, head bowed as he stared at his feet.
'Is that him?' Vergil said with a smile, seeing Kanae clearly for the first time.
'Yes' Cam replied. 'That is my son.'
Cam looked back towards him.
'Come down here Kanae. There's nothing to be afraid of.'
Kanae hesitated for a moment, shifting only a step.
'Kanae. I won't ask you again.'
Kanae stepped forwards reluctantly, descending slowly down the stairs, taking one step at a time.
'Oh, he's so cute' Wonderland cooed.
'It's you' Kanae said, visibly relaxing as he recognised her.
'Is it?' Wonderland asked then, patting herself down. 'Hey you're right.'
Kanae giggled at her, laughing behind his hands. 'You're funny' he grinned sheepishly.
'He looks like you, you know' Vergil said to Cam, continuing to watch Kanae affectionately.
'Do you think so?' Cam asked half-heartedly.
'Yes' Vergil said, 'I do.' He turned then, seeing Lucy walking down the stairs.
'Kanae there you are' she said the boy before glancing up at the others.
'I'm sorry' Cam said to her then. 'I…. Vergil needed help and…well I don't want you to feel uncomfortable. I hope you don't mind that they stay here for now.'
'It's ok' Lucy said descending the stairs slowly. 'I understand, and I trust them.'
She smiled to Vergil as she reached the bottom step.
'Would you like something to eat?' she asked him.
'If it's no trouble for you' Vergil said to her tiredly, still looking bedraggled, skin pale and eyes sunken.
'Not at all' Lucy said. 'It would be fun with all of us. The more the merrier….my family used to say…'
As they sat at the table sometime later, Wonderland entertained Kanae by making funny faces at him and making him laugh.

Kanae began to relax a little more. He seemed happy now, comfortable around Wonderland in particular.
'Would you like to see my wings?' she said to the boy after a time, and Lucy glanced up at her in surprise.
'Wings?' she uttered.
'Maybe you should stop talking now yeah?' Vergil suggested not so politely.
'Why?' Wonderland argued back. 'What would be the harm? I think it would be good to show this family what we really are, considering after all what Cam is.'
Cam looked uncomfortable suddenly, sitting at the breakfast table, he glanced over towards Talia who had joined them shortly after they had first come downstairs.
'You have wings?' Talia voiced then in confusion, speaking to Wonderland.
'You have no idea what we are' Wonderland said with an excited smile. 'We are…'
'Stop talking' Vergil said to her, and Wonderland fell quickly silent, smiling back at him.
'I'm sorry' Vergil spoke then, addressing the others, 'we weren't supposed to come here but…I thought I was going to die. I think I will be ok but if I …if I were to die, then I would want to see Cam one last time' he said glancing towards him.
Cam stared back uncomfortably, swallowing the lump in his throat. He glanced away quickly then.
'You have a history together?' Talia voiced curiously, glancing from Cam to Vergil and back again.
'Yes, you could say that' Vergil replied, speaking slowly. 'Wonderland and I…. we've known Cam. We are foreigners. That is all you need to know. We have travelled far, and Cam with us. He has been through so much.'
'It doesn't matter anymore' Cam spoke abruptly. 'I only care about what is happening now, and what will happen in the future.' He reached forwards then, taking a piece of bread. 'I don't want to think about the past' Cam mumbled, speaking almost to himself.
'There are many wonderful things in this world' Wonderland spoke. 'And Cam, as you may already know, well…. he is unlike anything known before in this world. The first of his kind. A WeatherMaker.'
'A WeatherMaker?' Talia repeated, look to Cam with great interest and curiosity now. 'I have never heard of such a thing.'
'They don't even exist in stories' Wonderland gleamed, leaning forwards with her elbows on the table. 'They never existed before, not ever. Cam is really…. there are no words to even describe what he is and what he is capable of. If you only knew.'
Cam stared at her as she spoke, unresponsive.
'Is…' Talia began hesitantly, 'is that true?'
'It is' Cam began, speaking only with reluctance. 'But I don't want you to think any different of me for it. I know you don't know me, I know you don't trust me. I am sorry for what I am. I wish I could change. All I ever wanted was a normal life. I never wanted these powers.'
'There is still a chance at a normal life' Wonderland said to him, showing her wings now, causing Talia to gasp in shock and awe, Lucy gave no reaction. 'We are never bound to one single path' she told them. 'I was born as a nobody and raised as an assassin.' She smiled then. 'My father was a king, but he never knew I existed.'

She bowed her large glassy wings again, Kanae as he stared up at her, was frozen in awe, eyes wide, but there was no fear in him.
'We never know what we will become' Wonderland continued. 'We never know where our life will lead us. I was supposed to be married by now. But things didn't quite work out.' She giggled then. 'That was an understatement. But I digress…I am happy where I am now… and I regret nothing.'

Later that day after breakfast, Lucy took Kanae out to play in the park, and Talia went out too, perhaps wanting to be alone, Cam sensed that she was uneasy, perhaps a little nervous of Cam still and his strange companions.
Wonderland was nowhere to be seen, having slipped away secretly. Only Vergil and Cam were alone now, together in the house.
'I like this house' Vergil was saying as he walked around slowly, taking in the surroundings. 'It's pleasant.'
'You have seen far grander homes' Cam said to him. 'Why are you still here?'
Vergil moved towards Cam, stepping closer to him and moving slowly. 'I feel a lot better' he said. 'You want me gone now?'
'I'm sorry' Cam said. 'I just…don't want to complicate things. Things between Lucy and I are…well…it's just difficult now. I still care for her but…I don't know' he shook his head. 'I can't explain it, I don't know what feels right anymore. So much has happened in my time away. Things are just different for me now, for both of us.'
'Do you love her?'
Cam said nothing but continued to stare at the floor.
Vergil moved closer still, standing right before him now.
'I will be watching over you' he said to him. 'Remember I am never far away.'
'I know' Cam said, raising his head at last, 'I thank you for it.' He paused, staring into Vergil's eyes, seeing Vergil's handsome face clearly now, as they stood close.
'I don't know when we will see each other again' Vergil said to him. 'Thank you for letting me stay here. Thank you for letting me see you one last time, in case I didn't make it.'
'I would want to see you' Cam replied. 'If you were to die soon, I would want to see you.'
Vergil stared at Cam deeply, his eyes gentle.
Vergil smiled, leaning forwards, he kissed Cam tenderly, pressing his lips to Cam's.
'I love you Cam' Vergil whispered to him. 'I love you.'
Vergil leant back then, tilting his head.
'Goodbye Cam.'
He turned and walked away without another word, without a pause, and as Cam watched him go, he felt a great pull at his heart.
In the blink of an eye, Vergil was gone, and once again, Cam was alone in the world.

He turned and headed upstairs to his room.
Cam sat on his bed, reaching for a book that lay on the side. He glanced towards the window then, gazing out at the world. It was cloudy outside, and there was no breeze. Everything was still.
Cam bowed his head again, opening the book.

Everything in the home was utterly silent as Cam tried to read, squinting down at the words, but he could not see them.
After only a short time he gave up, tossing the book to the side, feeling angry and frustrated.
He turned to the window then, staring miserably outwards, his vision out of focus. He tried to listen to the world, but all he could hear was the constant ringing in his ears.
It never went away.

Many days later

It was dark outside now, and Cam and Lucy were in the tower of the holy temple within the town. It was a tranquil place, and Lucy sometimes came here to watch the sun set. Today Cam came with her.
'I am scared for what I need to do' Cam was saying. 'Not because of the bad things I will have to do, but most of all, having to face Luke again.'
Lucy turned to Cam, standing in the shadows watching him, as Cam stood by the window, hugging himself as he stared at the ground beyond the glass. The sky brightly shone with stars on this night, it was cloudless, but Cam hardly felt the chill in the air.
'I worry' Cam went on, 'what he will think when he sees me. I have missed my brother terribly. I…I still love him. He was there for me my whole life…. but I pushed him away.'
'You did what you had to' Lucy said tiredly.
'Are you sure you still want to come with me?' Cam said to her, turning to face her now and unfolded his arms.
Lucy tilted her head at him, blinking several times.
'I love you Cam' she said to him. 'No matter how you feel about me…...I…I want you to know that I still love you. Our paths have crossed so many times in the past….and…you are the father to my child.' She dipped her head, pursing her lips. 'I have felt for a long time that we were destined to be together…. but things didn't quite turn out how I thought they would.'
'They never do.'
Lucy raised her head again.
'Maybe if I had not been born a prince' Cam uttered. 'It is a thought I have had so many times in the past. There is so much in my life I wish I could have changed. It all began with my father. Luke and I loved our father dearly. We never knew of any of the work he did as king, to us he was always a good father.' Cam paused, suddenly realising then, that he could not remember his father's face. He could not remember what his father looked like. 'It all began with his death' Cam said. 'That is where it all went wrong.' He turned to face Lucy then. 'Do you ever think of your family?'
'I have never forgotten them, and I think of them from time to time. It still hurts, I miss them dearly, but…' she smiled sadly, 'time has eased the pain… at least a little.' She paused. 'I do wish…they were still here. My mother especially…. would have loved to meet Kanae.'
Can stared off into nothing, his eyes out of focus.
'I hate my life' he mumbled. 'I hate all of it. Sometimes I wish I had never been born.'
Cam turned towards Lucy then, before looking away again.

‘Kanae is here’ he spoke suddenly.
‘What?’ Lucy gasped.
‘I can feel his emotion. He is scared.’
‘Scared of what?’
‘Of me.’ Cam said to Lucy. ‘Who knows’ he said shrugged, ‘maybe I look scarier in moonlight.’
‘Kanae. Come out’ Lucy spoke firmly.
A few seconds of silence passed, then a hand appeared from around the corner, and Kanae peered around.
‘Always hiding around corners lately’ Lucy sighed with exasperation. ‘Come here now.’
Kanae shuffled out, Lucy beaconed him over and he hurried towards her. She lowered herself onto the bench behind her, sitting him on her lap.
‘He’s always out and in places he shouldn’t be’ Lucy told Cam sullenly. ‘Kanae’ she said to him, ‘why are you awake?’
‘I couldn’t sleep’ Kanae replied.
‘That doesn’t give you an excuse to leave home and go wandering around. What if something bad had happened?’
‘But I was bored’ Kanae whined. ‘I went to find you, but you weren’t in your bed.’
‘How did you know we were here?’ Lucy asked.
‘I was wandering outside’ Kanae said, ‘and I saw him in the window.’
Lucy glanced towards Cam, who stood there with his arms folded.
Cam gave the boy a level expression as he stared back at him.
‘It’s dangerous to be out on your own’ he told the boy seriously.
Kanae did not reply but continued to stare back at Cam with wide eyes.
‘I should put him to bed’ Lucy mumbled, lifting him in her arms. ‘You have to promise you will go to sleep’ she said to Kanae then seriously. ‘I mean it, I don’t want to see you out of bed again. Do you understand me? I’ll be really cross if I find you out of your bed again.’
‘It’s ok’ Kanae said. ‘I won’t get caught.’
Lucy frowned at the boy in displeasure, Cam smirked in amusement at the response Kanae have given.
‘Come on’ Lucy said, hoisting him up as she rested him on her him. ‘Let’s go back to bed.’

She carried him back down the spiral stairs of the tower, Cam followed after her a step behind, as together they headed back home.
Lucy carried Kanae up the stairs and to his room, pulling back the sheets with one hand as she clutched him to her chest with the other.
She tucked him in, kissing him on the cheek and whispering into his ear softly before straightening again.
She left the room, closing the door quietly after her. Cam who had been waiting in the corridor, unfolded his arms then.
‘He will stay in bed this time?’ he asked her.
‘Who knows?’ Lucy shrugged. ‘He has always been unruly, he always likes to wander.’
‘Maybe he just wanted his mother.’
‘Maybe.’

‘I should go to bed too’ Cam uttered, moving away. ‘Goodnight’ he said to Lucy.
‘I hope we can talk again sometime’ Lucy said to him.
‘Sure’ Cam mumbled. ‘Maybe some other time.’

Interlude start

Frey stumbled up the stairs, which turned sharply left every twenty steps, climbing swiftly higher. The metal steps were painted gold, his heavy footsteps loud as he hurried up. There was only a thin railing to protect from the fall.
Frey paused for a moment, leaning back against the railing and holding himself, hand pressed to his ribs, where blood seeped from a wound. He gasped, chest rising and falling as his legs began to tremble. In the distance he could hear the factories working, great machines roaring in the distance, echoing across the open night.
Frey turned then, doubled over as he took another step upwards.
Above him, the clouds moved slowly across the starry sky, the moon in a crescent.
He reached the top of the stairs, slowing to a stop as he collapsed to his knees, moaning in discomfort. He sat back against the wall behind him, bowing his head. The drop to his side was sheer, the straight wall of the clocktower smooth like glass. The breeze was cold, biting sharply at his flesh, though he barely felt it.
Frey opened his jacked to look down at his chest.
His rib cage was open, exposing everything that was inside. However, there were no organs here, but gears instead. Metal gears and cogs and turning contraptions. Frey had once been born a human, with flesh and blood and bone. Now the only blood he had was artificial, the only truly human thing about his body, was the skin.
Frey stared down at himself, staring inside him.
He was damaged, parts of him no longer functioned accordingly, and despite what he was, he still felt some pain, though it was not as he had known it in his living flesh body.
Frey let out a sigh, breathing slowly.
He tipped his head back, resting against the cold hard wall, his eyes out of focus as he stared at the moon.
‘Such serenity’ Frey breathed, ‘of which I have never known…’
He heard sounds then, shouts in the distance, and he turned his head, seeing the tiny dark figures of the men that were searching for him. They were on the ground now, so far away.
‘You will never find me here’ Frey smiled to himself happily. ‘See if you can find me.’
He grimaced then, reaching inside his own chest, trying to fit back some of the cogs, before letting his hand drop then to his side.
‘I cannot fix myself on my own’ Frey breathed, staring upwards as he sat there on the hard floor. ‘There is no rush’ he smiled. ‘I am safe here. I just need to wait to be found by the right person.’
He closed his eyes then, allowing his body to relax and letting out a slow breath.

‘It’s so peaceful’ he whispered, before his body fell limp, and he slumped to the side, becoming utterly still.

Interlude end

‘Hey daddy! Look I drew a picture!’
Cam placed the cloth on the kitchen counter, watching Kanae with amusement as the boy held the picture out to him.
‘Oh, that’s very nice’ Cam said narrowing his eyes as he struggled to see. ‘Is that supposed to be me?’ he asked, as behind him Lucy watched happily, putting the last of the dishes away.
‘Yeah it is’ Kanae gleamed, very pleased with himself for what he had drawn. ‘Do you like it?’
‘Why do I look so angry?’ Cam asked.
‘That’s how you usually look isn’t it?’ Kanae replied.
Cam frowned back at Lucy and she began to giggle.
‘What is so funny?’
‘You do frown like that’ Lucy said.
Cam gritted his teeth, turning silently away.
‘Hey daddy?’
‘Don’t tug on my sleeve like that Kanae, its annoying.’
Kanae let go of his sleeve then, stepping back.
‘Can you pick me up?’ Kanae asked his father.
Cam sighed then, bending down he lifted Kanae in his arms, holding him close, his metallic arms wrapped around him gently
‘Let me see that picture’ Lucy said to him, and Kanae handed the paper to her.
‘I think it’s beautiful’ she gleamed.
‘You say that about everything I draw’ Kanae said in a muffled voice as he spoke behind his hands shyly.
‘That’s because it’s true’ Lucy told the boy, leaning forwards and caressing his cheeks lovingly, giving him kisses. ‘I love you so much.’
Kanae turned away from his mother then, burying his face into Cam’s shoulder. Lucy chuckled at him warmly, gliding away from them.
‘Hey I’ve just had a wonderful idea’ Lucy said snapping her fingers. ‘Why don’t we go out for a picnic?’
‘Yey!’ Kanae cried excitedly, ‘I love picnics.’
‘Have you ever been on a picnic before?’ Lucy asked Cam, tilting her head at him.
‘No’ Cam grumbled, ‘I haven’t. I’ve read about them though.’

Lucy smiled, shaking her head sadly. ‘No, I guess a prince or a king would not go on a picnic.’
‘No wait’ Cam said, his brow furrowed as he thought to himself, struggling to collect his memories. ‘I…. I did once, I long time ago, just one time, with my father, and my brother. This was long before he became sick.’
‘Did you have fun?’ Lucy asked him.
‘I don’t remember’ Cam said, ‘I probably did.’
‘Well would you like to go on another one’ Lucy asked, ‘with us, as a family?’
‘Yes’ Cam said quietly. ‘I think that would be nice.’
‘I love picnics, I would love to go on a picnic with you dad.’
Cam glanced down at his son, still holding him close.
‘You would want to go on a picnic with me?’
‘Yes daddy.’
Cam smiled down at his son.
‘Alright’ he said, smiling at Lucy now, ‘let’s eat outside, it’s a nice day for it, and even if it wasn’t, I could make the clouds go away.’

They took one of the ponies, loading up the small cart behind it with everything they needed for the picnic, plenty of food and blankets to sit on.
Lucy was in the home, gathering the last few things that they would need as Cam sat in the driver’s seat behind the horse, taking the reins in his hands.
He lifted one of his hands to his face then, staring at the joints closely.
Dammit is that rust?
‘Come here Kanae’ Cam spoke quietly to him.
Kanae who had been running around in circles nearby stopped suddenly them, padding towards the cart.
He began to clamber awkwardly up the step at the front of the cart. Cam reached down, grasping his arm and pulling him up.
‘Can I drive the cart?’
‘No’ Cam answered patiently. ‘I will do it.’
Behind them Lucy stepped out of the home, carrying a few bags, she saw Kanae sitting beside Cam waiting for her, and could not help but smile as she watched them.
‘Are you coming?’ Cam asked her.
‘Yes.’
She held the bags before her, striding towards them and moving around the cart, sitting beside Cam and reaching to put the bags down in the cart behind.
‘Come on Kanae’ Lucy said to him, ‘don’t sit on your father, he needs to drive.’
Lucy took Kanae from Cam, placing him on her own lap and hugging him tightly to her.
‘Got everything?’ Cam asked her, glancing her way.
‘Yes, I think so’ Lucy beamed back. ‘Whatever I may have forgotten is not important.’ She grinned widely at him. ‘Let’s go’ she told him eagerly, ‘I’m already so excited.’

Cam looked ahead, snapping the reins, the pony raised its head, taking its first steps forwards. They walked along the road at a leisurely pace, and then he heard a whisper in his ear.

'You've never been on a picnic before except with your father? How sad. You completely forgot your old team you claimed to have cared so much for…. what were their names? Magnet and Pink and the others. You went out with them, and you forgot. I guess they were not all that important to you after all.'

Cam narrowed his eyes, his body becoming tense as the voice wore on his nerves, though he tried to ignore it. He knew it was one of the masked figures, and he knew that only he could hear this voice. They were teasing him again, taunting him. Cam did not want to react to it.

They travelled for a few hours, the journey was mostly silent and very uneventful. Eventually they came to a beautiful secluded area, a meadow far away from any town or village.

Cam pulled the cart up beside a small tree at the edge of the meadow, untying the pony as Lucy went to take the bags from the cart. Kanae who had gotten bored with sitting quietly for so long began to run around the meadow, casing the butterflies.

In the centre there was a tree, a single tree that grew tall. Lucy made her way over towards it, Cam and Kanae following after.

The pony remained at the bottom of the meadow, as the small family made their way towards the centre of the meadow.

Lucy lay out the blanket beside the tree, kneeling on it and placing the basket she carried down upon it.

Kanae began to jump up and down beside the tree, trying to climb it, but the branches were too high for him to reach.

'Do you need help?' Cam asked her, moving to stand beside Kanae.

'No, I'm ok' Lucy smiled back.

Cam watched her closely, she blushed slightly, before quickly looking away again, busying herself with unpacking the food.

Cam knelt, lifting Kanae on his shoulder. Kanae reached up, grasping for the branch overhead that was nearest him. Cam helped him as he clambered awkwardly into the tree,

'Be careful' Lucy spoke with concern.

'It's ok' Cam said stepping back, head tilted above him. 'I'm watching him.'

'Don't let him fall.'

Cam turned back to face her, she watched him silently.

'Are you hungry?' she asked him.

Cam mumbled, frowning to himself as he thought about this.

'I think I am a little bit.'

Cam glanced above him towards Kanae then as he continued to climb, before looking back at Lucy and moving to sit beside her.

She offered him some food, and Cam took it, still keeping a close watch on Kanae as leaves from above began to rain upon them.

They ate together, peacefully in silence, until leaves began to fall more heavily on their heads.

'Kanae' Lucy glowered up at her, 'get down from there.'

Cam rose, lifting Kanae from the tree and placing him gently on the floor again, ignoring Kanae's moans of disappointment.
'Come Kanae, have something to eat' Lucy said to him.
Kanae sat on his mother's lap, sharing her food at they ate, Cam watched them, feeling a strange emotion inside.
He was happy.
There was a warmth in his heart, a warmth that felt so foreign to him. He had been happy, truly happy very rarely in his life. He wanted to think of nothing else now, but his family. He had a family. The thought was still a strange one to him.
Cam glanced to the side then, seeing a dark shape between the trees at the edges of the meadow. He knew who this was, even behind the mask. It was Vergil. He watched the family of three closely now from a distance, before stepping backwards and out of sight.

They returned home late that day, and Lucy went inside to put Kanae immediately to bed. The boy was very tired.
As she did this, Cam went around the back of the house, putting the cart away and feeding the pony, before locking it away in the stables.
'You've had a long day today' Cam said to the little horse, rubbing its head and feeling its fluffy fur. 'You've travelled far. Rest now.'
By the time he came inside, Kanae had been put to bed, and everything was silent in the home.
'Where is Talia?' Cam asked quietly.
'She's asleep' Lucy replied moving closer to him.
She took his hands in her own, holding them tenderly.
'Thank you for today' she said to him. 'I really enjoyed it.'
'Yeah' Cam mumbled, turning away, 'me too.'
'We should do it again sometime' Lucy said.
'Yeah…that…would be nice.'
Lucy smiled, the edges of her eyes crinkled.
'I'm very happy' she said to him, 'I just want you to know that.'
'I'm glad' Cam spoke quietly, 'I want you to be happy.'
Lucy raised her eyes to Cam's then, staring into his strange eyes, one milky, the other blue in colour.
She blinked, tilting her head. She paused for a moment, before leaning forwards.
She kissed Cam on the lips. Doing ever so gently. Cam did not pull away, he did not resist her.
Lucy leant back then, smiling.
Cam raised his mechanical hand, caressing her, weaving his fingers through her orange hair and holding the back of her head tenderly.
He kissed her back as she leant into him, grasping at his chest.
She pulled him back towards the sofa, laying down on it as Cam bore over her, kissing her.
They kissed passionately now, Cam caressing Lucy's shoulder, his hands moving down her body, winding around her thigh, running down her leg and lifting her skirt.

Lucy moaned then as he ran his fingers up the inside of her thigh, caressing her between the legs.
Cam leant back then, as he touched her bare skin with his metallic fingers, she flinched slightly then.
'What's wrong?' Cam mumbled quietly.
'Cold' Lucy breathed.
'I'm sorry.'
'It's ok. Don't stop.'
Cam continued to move, touching her down below, though it was difficult for him, he could not feel anything anymore in his hands. Before he had been able to make her feel good, but now…
She rasped suddenly, drawing a sharp between her teeth.
'You're pinching me.'
He drew back sharply then, sitting back against his heels and staring down at her sadly, before rising to his feet and turning away.
'I'm sorry' he breathed.
'Where are you going?'
'To bed' he told her shortly, 'I'll see you in the morning.'
'Cam wait…'
He paused reluctantly, glancing back at her.
'Why do you say that you love me?' he asked her. 'Why? How can you claim to love me like this?'
'I don't care what you look like Cam' Lucy told him, 'no matter how much you've changed, you are still you.'
Cam bowed his head. He walked away.
'Cam wait!'
But he was already gone, marching swiftly back upstairs, he didn't hear Lucy's words, only the ringing in his ears, which was constant.

Chapter Thirty Four

It was peaceful on this day, Cam sat with a book outside the home, hearing the faint sounds around him within the village, alongside the ringing in his ears. He wasn't reading. He couldn't read, not anymore now that his eyes failed to see the words, but just to hold a book in his hands brought him some comfort.
Behind him, inside the home Lucy was cleaning. Cam had offered to help, but she had declined, saying she knew just how she wanted things wanted, and that she was happier doing it by herself. And so, Cam had gone away to sit outside, to simply be, and see the world

around him, the book resting on his lap. He still loved book, all his life he had, immersing himself in the stories as he had loved so much. In his darkest days, this was what gave him the most comfort, to read the elaborate tales with other worlds, within the pages of the books, of which in the palace he had once lived, there were thousands.

Talia was not in the house, she was outside somewhere doing something, and Kanae was in the garden of the home playing. Lucy would check up on him every so often, he had the bad habit of wandering off and doing things he shouldn't be doing, things that may have caused harm, like climbing high places, and risk falling. But the last time Lucy had checked, Kanae was sitting in the garden, playing with little wooden trains, a gift given to him by the fairy Wonderland. He was fascinated by them, as was Lucy and Talia at the time. Wonderland had tried to explain in simple terms to them what a train was. Kanae of course had not understood, but he loved the toy nonetheless.

Cam now sat at the front of the house, listening to an audio book with headphones, while resting the paper book on his lap. He would have sat with Kanae in the garden, but now he wanted only to be alone.

He was immersed in his audio book, a story of a merman who had swum up from the dark depths of the ocean, so deep a place that the sun could not reach. The merman suffered political strife in the dark kingdom at the bottom of the sea, and so swam upwards towards the sun to start a new life. He had broken the surface of the water, unfurling his great fins like wings, and flew over the land. Driven by determination, what he had learned in the past, he would use to help his future, and create a new and better world, a new and better life, for everyone.

Cam felt something then that alarmed him.

His mind left the story with a jolt, feeling at first a little disorientated. He stared away, body frozen and rigid.

Within his heart and mind he felt an increasing fear. His body began to sweat, and his breath increased.

He rose swiftly to his feet, the book on his lap falling to the floor as he pulled his headphones out.

His eyes grew wide then as he stepped forwards, moving closer towards the source of what disturbed him.

There were men, soldiers in the area.

Cam broke in to a run.

He ran away from the house, as fast as he could, coming to the centre of the small village and slowing to a stop.

Now he could hear clearly the screams. People were running for their lives. Fleeing from the soldiers.

Cam whipped out his magic then as an arrow shot towards him, breaking it in the air. If he had not acted so quickly, it would have struck him.

Cam turned his head towards the archer that stood on the roof of the thatched cottage beside him.

He turned away then, walking forwards, leaving behind the man's broken body. Slashed to the bone. He had died before he knew what had happened, his blood now seeped into the hay, staining it red.

'HOW MANY TIMES TO I HAVE TO DO THIS!?' Cam screamed at the men around him, turning slowly on the spot. 'AND HOW DARE YOU KILL OTHER INNOCENT PEOPLE TO GET TO ME. *HOW FUCKING DARE YOU!*'

They surrounded him now, having closed the trap around him.

Cam felt anger rising inside him as he reached outwards with his magic, sensing the fear of the villagers around him elsewhere that were out of eyeshot. He could feel their fear, it was strong now, stronger than it had been before. People were dying, and Cam wondered as he stood there, how many of them he knew, had spoken to. The parents of the children Kanae had played with, the people he had bought his food from, had helped work on their farms, tended to their animals. How many people had been lost?

'No more innocent people will die because of me' Cam whispered to himself as one of the leading soldiers around him called out a command, the tens around Cam now raising their bows and crossbows.

Cam spotted something by his feet then, he had not seen before, his eyes still poor, he could hardly see. Cam was horrified as he suddenly realised who this was. It was the body of the young girl he had seen the previous day. Kanae had played with her, Cam had spoken to her that day Kanae was climbing the tree, she had approached him, touched his metal arms. It was that girl, so young, though he had forgotten her name.

Everything stopped then, and Cam felt as if time had frozen suddenly, as he stared down at the girl's body, seeing every detail of her corpse clearly, the blood soaked her dress, pooled around her where she lay. She had been stabbed.

'FIRE!'

The soldiers released the strings of their bows, firing their arrows, their crossbows. Cam remained where he stood in the centre of it all, staring downwards.

He raised his head then. There was a circle around him. The arrows and bolts had hit the shield he had created. A shield of magic, invisible. They rested on the floor now all around him. They had not even come near him.

Cam stood there with eyes out of focus, he clenched his teeth, swallowing.

Fire whipped around him then, great streams of flame, growing out of thin air.

Men began to scream.

But Cam did not stop.

Cam heard a voice screaming in his head then, begging him to stop, but Cam did not listen.

CAM STOP YOU'RE LOSING CONTROL!

Cam raised his hand, grasping at his skull painfully on the left side.

His eyes began to turn red, his eyes bloodshot from pure rage.
CAM I'M BEGGING YOU!
Cam snarled, feeling rage and agony coursing through his body, an anger he had never felt before.
CAM!
Cam could not remember, after this event, everything that had happened, not until after the soldiers were all dead.
He tilted his head to the side then. His eyes were out of focus, all he could see around him now, were all the colours blended together, but most of what he was around him, was fire. And he felt its heat
Cam stood there. He didn't know how much time had passed. He felt confused and disorientated. For a moment he didn't know where he was.
And then he felt something.
His eyes widened slowly, and he felt intense fear and horror for the second time.
His heart jolted sharply in his chest and he wheeled around.
'….Kanae?'
Cam began to walk forwards, the fires burning around him quickly extinguished.
He picked up his pace, breaking into a run as he headed towards one of the buildings nearby, the temple, where Kanae liked to play. He wasn't at home like he should have been. He was here.
The fire that enveloped the wooden structure suddenly went out, and wood and stone was tossed aside like it weighed nothing.
Cam's throat began to tighten as he approached the wreckage. He was struggling to breathe through his panic now, hoping against hope that what he feared was not true. But as he threw the debris aside, he saw with horror, Kanae's lifeless body.
Cam screamed, stumbling towards him and falling to his knees, he picked up Kanae, cradling him in his arms and rocking back on his heels as he cried in despair.
'How could you let this happen!?' he wailed, tears streaming down his cheeks. '*How?! Why were you not watching over him!'*
The eight masked figures surrounded him now, watching him silently like phantoms.
'HOW COULD YOU LET THIS HAPPEN!' Cam screamed. '*NOT MY SON!!!*'
'I'm sorry' Vergil whispered, taking his mask away from his face. 'This was a mistake.'
'Why are you apologising?' one of the other masked figures snapped at Vergil then, whipping the mask off her face. 'We never promised to protect his son! Only him. Only Lucy. And besides…' she looked back at Cam, 'it was you who did this' she finished quietly.
The realisation as Cam heard, was like being stabbed in the heart.
'No….' Cam whimpered pathetically as his body began to tremble, 'no it was an accident…'
He looked down at Kanae's body, and it was clear to see that he was dead, with no hope or chance to bring him back. His head had been crushed, and there was so much blood.
'*SAVE HIM!*' Cam screamed at the figures surrounded them. *'Please for the love of gods I'll do anything!'*
'It's too late' Reuben shook his head. 'He's already gone…I'm sorry…'
'No, you have to do something' Cam begged, shaking his head in denial. 'Put him in a clockwork body! *Anything*! Please!'

‘It doesn’t work like that’ Lucas spoke calmly. ‘Not even a god can achieve the impossible. Life is a complex thing. You cannot make it out of nothing, and you cannot restore what is already lost.’
‘There must be an afterlife’ Cam sobbed, clinging to anything he had. ‘*Please*…’
‘There is no afterlife’ Lucas answered quietly.
‘But there are other worlds’ Cam gasped, ‘there is magic!’
‘Magic has a limit’ Lucas replied, ‘and the worlds you have visited are not the afterlife…. I’m sorry…he’s gone.’
Cam let out a howl of despair, throwing his head back and holding Kanae’s tiny frame in his arms.
Cam screamed and cried until his throat was sore. Nothing was real to him now except pain and despair and shock.
When next he looked around him, he saw that the masked figures were gone. Now there was only one figure standing before him now a short distance away, just beyond the rubble of the broken temple.
He recognised this figure by her orange hair.
It was Lucy.
She stared at him, frozen to the spot. Cam could sense she was slipping into shock, as her mind slowly processed what she saw before her.
She collapsed, falling to her knees, and fainted. Cam reached his magic out to her just in time to catch her and save her from falling, laying her down gently on the ground.
All around them, out of Cam’s field of vision, people stared.
Talia was not far away, she rushed up to Lucy’s fallen body then, glancing up towards Cam fearfully and seeing him kneeling with Kanae in his arms.
Cam could not sense her feelings, she was unable to feel anything now. It was all too much for her.
‘Why can’t I just die?’ Cam hissed through gritted teeth. ‘Why does any of this have to happen? Why can’t I just die? Why do I even have to exist? All I do is cause pain and hurt those around me…. why? Why….? My life has been nothing but one long nightmare…. of pure *hell*….’

Cam carried his son’s body out of the town, digging deep and burying him within the forest beside a stream.
Cam straightened then, filling the hole with the dirt again, covering his sons body.
He stood there listlessly, gathering the dirt over the grave, and withdrawing his magic when it was done.

Cam stood there for several minutes, before sinking to his knees, sobbing into his hands.
'Don't even think about ending your own life now.'
'Vergil' Cam gasped. 'Why…why not? Why tell me what to do? And how do you know what I'm thinking?'
Vergil stepped back.
'It's obvious' he replied to Cam simply. 'Anyone in your position would want the same, you have been through so much after all, it would be strange if you did not want to do such a thing. But remember that you are living for others now. You have not returned to the palace yet and repaired the damage you have allowed to happen over the years. You want to do good in this world? You want to mend your sins? Then keep on living… and do what you originally planned to do before all of this.'
'I am a monster.'
'Yes' Vergil replied.
'How will I face Lucy again? How could I allow this to happen?'
He was met with only silence, and when he raised his head, he saw that he was alone once more.

It was hours later, when he returned to the town once again.
'Where is Lucy?'
'She is…' Vergil replied quietly.
'Why won't you answer?' Cam said turning towards him, Vergil wore his mask now, and Cam could not see his face. 'Is there something wrong?'
'No' Vergil replied sombrely. 'But….'
'What is it?'
'She's not taking this well.'
Cam turned away silently, gritting his teeth, tears prickling in his eyes
'She is very sick.'
'Sick?'
'She's been under so much stress lately. It was making her unwell for the longest time, now…she….'
Cam blinked slowly, staring sadly back at him.
'Should I go see her?' he asked, speaking to no one in particular. 'Maybe it would be better if I don't. Should I? I don't know what to do…'
'She's sleeping now' Vergil said to him. 'She is….'
'Where is she?' Cam asked him. 'Is she at home?'
'No' Vergil replied, 'she is at the healers.'
Cam without pause marched away, heading towards the healers.
Moments later, he entered the modest building, using his magic to close the door after him.
There were only two figures he saw inside, dressed all in white. Though Cam could not see their expressions clearly with his eyes, he felt their instant fear.

‘Where is Lucy?’
‘Please don’t hurt us?’ the woman pleaded, dropping what she was carrying with a clatter and hunching her shoulders, showing her hands submissively.
‘I’m not…’
The woman fled the room then, followed shortly by the other healer, a young man. They ran to the next room, and a moment later, another older figure came to the room.
‘Why are you here?’ the mature figure asked Cam.
‘Where is Lucy?’
The old healer didn’t reply, instead he turned to the side, glancing through the open doorway nearby and into the room beyond. The room was bright and open, and upon the bed, Cam could just make out an orange head of hair.
He stepped forwards, moving slowly towards her.
Cam stopped by the edge of the bed, reaching out to her tentatively, his metallic hands around her face, though he did not touch her.
She was completely still.
‘What has happened to her?’
‘We’ve given her some drugs’ the old healer replied, approaching him from behind. ‘She’s under a lot of stress, her heart is erratic and…. we put her to sleep to calm her down.’
‘When will she wake? ‘
‘It’s best if she sleeps for now’ the healer replied. ‘We don’t want to cause her more harm.’

Cam left the healers quickly. He walked away from the small town.
He walked for hours, heading deep into the woods until he at long last came to a stop.
Cam pulled a pipe from his coat pocket with shaking fingers, using his magic to light it.
He smoked heavily, slipping into a trance, and making himself numb to the world.
It was the only way he could cope.
As he sat there breathing in the fumes, his twitching became worse.
From a short distance away, Vergil watched him.
It was hours later when he stepped forward to make himself known, kneeling down and lifting Cam over his shoulder and carrying him.
He took him away, back to Lacklustre Paradise, the home world of the eight, where he helped him recover, if not for a short time.

It was the next day when Cam was returned to his own world again, and he found himself back in Lucy’s home, leaning upon the balcony, his body twitching uncontrollably.
He held his metallic fingers together tightly, gritting his teeth.
‘Why won’t it stop?’ he hissed. ‘Give me more.’
‘You can’t have anymore’ Vergil told him patiently. ‘It would be harmful for you.’

‘I don’t care’ Cam rasped, hand going to his head as he scratched at his left ear unconsciously. ‘I need it.’
‘You want to numb the pain?’
‘Yes.’
‘You have to face what you’ve done eventually.’
‘Not now’ Cam breathed, stepping towards the masked figure and reaching out to him. ‘I’m telling you…...not…...now…. It’s taking everything in my being to stop me destroying myself.’
Vergil let out a weary sigh, turning his head away.
‘I’m leading you down a bad path if I let you continue this’ he said.
‘It is my choice’ Cam breathed.
‘Very well’ Vergil relented, facing Cam again at last. ‘Here.’
Vergil brought a silver pipe out from under his cloak, lighting the end in one swift movement, before lifting it to Cam’s lips.
Cam leant forwards, taking a deep pull, his pupils instantly dilating.
He let out a breath, breathing out the dark blue-purple smoke that clung around them both.
Vergil removed his mask, taking a pull from the pipe himself.
Cam stumbled towards him, grabbing Vergil around the back of the neck and leaning into him. He raised his head, lips hovering over Vergil’s as he remained there. Vergil remained impassive, unmoving. He supported Cam’s weight now as Cam leant into him. Cam kissed Vergil briefly, before bowing his head, body slumped.
Vergil caught him before he fell.
He helped walk Cam back to his room, laying him down on the bed.
Cam stared with eyes unseeing towards the ceiling, his body feeling light, and his mind empty.
Vergil sat on the edge of the bed then, leaning back over Cam for a moment, staring into his face. He brushed Cam’s hair back tenderly.
‘Your hair is getting so long’ he said to him, though Cam did not hear. ‘I love you’ Vergil breathed, ‘it pains me to see you like this, it truly does.’
He rose from the bed slowly, moving away from Cam and back into the corridor, walking towards the balcony again.
Vergil paused, glancing behind him briefly, before facing ahead again, back towards the open world.
The sun shone brightly, and everything seemed so peaceful and still. Everything seemed so beautiful.
‘Serenity’ Vergil sighed. ‘It still exists in this world.’
He stepped through the portal, vanishing then, and leaving Cam alone to rest.
It would be many hours later when Cam finally opened his eyes, and when he did, it was night time.

Cam left the home and went to go find Lucy at the healers, but she was not in her bed.
‘Where is she?’

‘I don’t know’ the old healer replied. ‘She was here just a moment ago, she must have just left.’
‘Are you serious?’ Cam snarled in anger. ‘You don’t know where she went?’
The old healer just watched him passively.
Cam turned back to face the empty bed, not knowing how to feel about any of this. The truth was he was incapable of feeling much of anything right now, the drugs he had taken earlier that day had dulled his mind and made him numb inside, numb to everything.
He left the healers, stepping out into the streets and standing there with his head down, not knowing what to do.
‘She’s near the beach’ Vergil said, appearing suddenly by his side.
‘Beach?’ Cam echoed. ‘The beach is miles away from here.’
‘You should go see her.’
Cam tried to orient himself, struggling to remember which way the beach was.
He stepped forwards, breaking into a jog. He ran away from Vergil and out of the town, heading towards Lucy.
It was a great distance away and took a long time to get there.
By the time Cam reached the cliffs, he was exhausted, sweating and breathing heavily.
‘I found you’ Cam voiced, speaking clearly. ‘I can’t believe you walked all this way.’
Lucy stood at the edge of the cliff with her back to him. Upon hearing his voice, she turned slowly around to face him, her orange hair whipping around her face in the strong sea wind.
‘What are you doing here?’ she spoke in a dead voice.
‘I….’ Cam uttered, feeling suddenly uncertain. ‘I was worried about you.’
Lucy said nothing, but simply stared back at him with empty eyes.
She turned back around then, facing the horizon.
‘…. Lucy?’
Lucy stepped forward suddenly, off the edge of the cliff.
Cam watched her fall, his mind sluggish, he let out a slow gasp, tearing forwards with a cry of despair.
He could not see anything below him in the darkness, his eyes failing.
Panic clawed at his heart then, and he used his magic to light the entire area, as bright as if it were day. He saw something that might have been her, rising and jumping off the cliff himself, descended slowly to the rocks below by his magic. He touched down, scrambling towards her broken body.
Cam stood over her, the waves crashing against the rocks behind him.
He stared down at Lucy in shock, not feeling the cold around him, not feeling anything at all.
He knelt down and lifted her in his arms, using his magic to steady himself against the slippery rock. Cam reached his magic out towards her and realised with disbelief...
‘She’s still alive…...!’

Interlude start

Farrell left once it was all over, returning to his lonely home. Not knowing truly what had happened on this day, nor why. Why his beloved wife and child had been taken from him so callously.
He was gripped by a sudden sense of unreality, suddenly seeing the world in a different light. Since Brice's death, things had changed. Now, the world was grey.
It was dark now. Farrell stumbled through the kitchen and into the dining room. He grabbed onto the dressing table for support, head hung as he experienced such deep and unpleasant emotions, he couldn't put a label to them. He thought for a moment, that the pain and misery he was feeling must surely be worse than death itself.
It was dark now, and the house was quiet, the servants were asleep at home or elsewhere. Farrell thought he was alone, but he not.
He heard movement close by and glanced up to see a shadowy figure. He had been so caught up in his thoughts; he had not heard anyone approaching.
As the figure stepped forward he saw that it was Arlen, an expression of raw fury on his face.
'*You.'*
He grabbed Farrell by the shoulders and slammed him against the wall, Farrell felt the cold sharp touch of steel at his throat, and he instinctively drew back away from the blade his brother held to him.
'YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT HER!' Arlen screamed. 'SHE IS *DEAD* NOW BECAUSE OF YOU!'
He grabbed Farrell by the hair, slamming his head back hard against the wall, and lifting the blade higher against his throat, pushing harder. Farrell felt the slice of metal and the hot trickle of blood. But he did not resist. He almost whished his brother would kill him.
But Arlen could not bring himself to do it.
He drew back, letting the knife slip from his fingers, as he backed away, sobbing and gasping.
'You were supposed to protect her….' he whispered. 'You were supposed to protect her….'
And then he was consumed with another wave of anger. His brow knitted together and his gums showed in a snarl. He looked at his brother, in a way he never had before in his life.
With loathing.
'I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!' he cried turning on the spot and marching away. 'I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU *AGAIN*!' He unclasped the cloak from around his neck as he stormed off. The cloak Farrell had given him as a gift years ago. He had worn it all this time, so much it had meant to him. A gift from his brother.
Arlen paused at the door, speaking one last time.
'Never try to look for me. Never try to find me. If I ever see you again, I *will* kill you.'
He slammed the door, and Farrell was left, completely alone.

The next morning, Farrell had learnt that Arlen had left the town altogether.
He was not seen again.

Interlude end

‘Why did she do this?’ Cam sobbed, the pain in the left side of his head almost unbearable now. ‘Did she truly want to die?’
‘Sometimes the despair becomes too great’ Vergil replied calmly. ‘It’s difficult to live through such things, it’s difficult in life to keep going.’
‘Things may work out for the better’ Wonderland said to Cam, lowering her hood as she turned to him.
‘What?’ Cam breathed.
‘She remembers nothing.’
They were in the healers now. It was well past midnight, and there was no one else around. There was only Cam, the two figures of Vergil and the fairy Wonderland, and Lucy within the building now. All else was silent.
‘What do you mean?’ Cam uttered.
‘She survived the fall’ Wonderland said to him, ‘she will recover, but her bones need time to heal.’ She paused then, wondering how to continue. ‘She’ Wonderland began at last, ‘hit her head when she fell. The fact that she survived is nothing short of a miracle, of which we had no part in’ she added hastily. ‘But she has lost her memory of all recent events’ she said to Cam. ‘You should take this as a blessing.’
‘Might she remember?’ Cam asked. ‘One day?’
‘It’s possible that the memory of…. her loss’ Wonderland spoke, choosing her words carefully, ‘will return to her, or she may have forgotten it entirely. There is no way of knowing. The brain is a complex thing.’
Cam blinked slowly.
‘She is awake now Cam’ Wonderland said to him, ‘if you want to see her again.’
Cam swallowing the lump in his throat, feeling suddenly uneasy. ‘You should see her’ Vergil prompted. ‘I think that would be best.’

Cam entered the next room, walking towards the bed slowly as he did.
The room was lit by a single candle, resting on the table beside the bed.
Lucy groaned as Cam approached her, resting on her back in an upright position.
‘Is that you?’ she mumbled, speaking in an incredibly weak voice.
‘Lucy…’
‘Is that Cam?’
‘I’m here’ Cam mumbled, his chest constricting painfully, his heartbeat pained, his very breath pained him. ‘H-how do you feel?’
‘I…. I can’t remember….’
Cam looked over her body. She lay on her back, the thin white sheet covering her body from the chest down. Cam could see the flesh of her shoulders, her pale skin was covered in bruises, and she had bandages all over her, and around her head. Her hair had been tied back, and her face cleaned.
Lucy let out a sigh.

‘I….. Cam….’ She paused then, letting out another sigh, ‘what happened Cam?’ she whispered. ‘Why am I here?’
Cam stared down at her, unable to feel anything inside him.
What should I do? What should I….? should I tell her? I couldn’t possibly tell her…can I? Should I….?
‘Lucy’ Cam breathed. ‘I…. I love you…. more than anything else…. But I uh…. I wish you… I wish only for…. I wish you…. I….’ he let out a sigh, unable to find his words. ‘I want only what is best for you’ he told her after a time. ‘I love you. You are the most precious thing in the world for me. But I feel that I am only causing you harm.’ He paused then. ‘Maybe it is best if… if we had never met. Maybe’ he went on, ‘I should just go away.’
‘What are you talking about?’ Lucy mumbled, her voice barely audible.
‘Do you want me to leave? I’m serious.’
‘No’ Lucy breathed. ‘No, I don’t want to lose you. Why would you say that?’
Cam stared at her, unsure of how to respond.
‘I’m sorry’ Cam was unable to say anything else. ‘I’m sorry I ever came into your life…’

It took Lucy many months to recover, her broken bones, day by day they were slowly healing, but her memories had not come back to her. Not yet anyway, and Cam, he watched her from a distance as she continued to recover, eventually she was able to walk around. Day by day, she was becoming stronger.
‘What happened to Talia?’ Cam asked Vergil shortly after.
‘She is gone’ Vergil said to him. ‘She is gone.’
Cam after that spent his days looking after Lucy, attending to her every need. Even after she had fully healed, he did so much for her.
On one of these days, Cam and Lucy were sitting together on the balcony of her home, sitting quietly as they ate.
Cam raised his head up at her.
Lucy ate slowly, keeping her head down. Cam continued to watch her.
Their interactions had been strained most of the time, Lucy rarely spoke, and she was not the same she had been before.
Cam considered her, wondering if he should speak.
‘Is there anything else I can get for you?’ he voiced at last.
Lucy raised her head, lifting her hand then and frowning in discomfort.
‘Does your head still hurt?’ Cam asked her.
‘A little.’
Lucy lowered her hand again, resting her hand on her lap.
‘Why can’t I remember anything?’ she asked Cam.
‘I don’t think you should.’
‘Did something bad happen?’ Lucy asked him seriously. ‘Why don’t I know?’

‘You hit your head’ Cam told her.
Lucy lowered her head again, staring down at her lap sadly.

That night she went to bed early, and Cam met with Vergil on the balcony.
‘What is going to happen?’ he asked Vergil forlorn.
‘Do you mean to ask if she will regain her memory?’
Cam let out a sigh, his body twitching. He scratched the left side of his head, before straightening again.
‘Would you want her to remember?’ Vergil asked Cam. ‘Honestly?’
‘I don’t know’ Cam sighed again. ‘I just don’t know.’
There was a silence between them then, Cam stood by the door, while Vergil leant back against the balcony with his arms folded.
‘She may remember again’ Vergil said to him, ‘if something triggers the memory.’
‘You mean….’ Cam raised his head.
‘You want her to remember?’ Vergil said to him, surprised at this.
‘I think it’s the right thing to do.’
‘Maybe not’ Vergil replied. ‘Who can say?’
‘I can’t leave her alone like this’ Cam mumbled. ‘It would be wrong of me. I have to…. I …. I cannot leave things like this the way they are. I have to fix things here, then move onto the capital.’
‘You will leave soon then’ Vergil said.
‘Yes. I’ve stayed here for far too long’ Cam said, ‘I want to leave, I want to move on.’
‘I see’ Vergil said turning away. ‘You don’t want to leave things unfinished, I understand that.’
He fell silent then, glancing towards Cam.
‘When will you do it?’
‘Soon’ Cam said. ‘This is something that must be done.’

The next morning, Cam took Lucy outside.
‘Where are we going?’ Lucy asked him quietly.
‘There is something I have to show you’ Cam said to her. ‘There is something I want you to remember, though it will be difficult. The truth….it will hurt to learn, but I have to do this, I have to.’
Lucy trailed after him as they moved through the village, heading closer to the temple.
‘What happened here?’ Lucy breathed, staring up at the temple in shock. ‘This temple, it was not like this before.’
In the days that followed her recovery, she had rarely left her home. Cam had done so much for her, nearly everything.
The temple had been partially destroyed, and some attempts had been made to repair the damage, but it was not enough. It still remained incomplete. People at this time were too busy working the fields.
She had not seen the temple since that day they had lost Kanae. Vergil thought bringing her here would trigger her memory, and as Cam watched, he saw her expression change.

She groaned then, holding her head as her mind suddenly pained her. Since that day she had suffered so many headaches.
She looked up then, eyes wide.
'Are you remembering?' Cam asked her, as they stood before the ruins of the temple. No effort had been made to clear this part of the temple at the front. The rubble had been left as it had been that day.
Lucy furrowed her brow, stepping forwards, ascending the short flight of steps into the wreckage.
She turned sharply then towards the spot where Kanae's body had been found, clapping her hands over her mouth, shoulders hunched, eyes widening further.
'Oh gods' she breathed. 'Is it true?'
Behind her Cam watched passively, seeing her as she experienced these emotions.
For the longest time, she simply stood there, back to Cam, staring at that spot where Kanae had been pulled from the rubble.
Cam swallowed the lump in his throat, stepping towards her, he moved carefully forwards.
'Did that really happen?' Lucy whimpered, turning to him sharply then, tears streaming from her eyes. 'Did you……. *did you kill our son*….?'
Cam said nothing, continuing to watch her, he blinked slowly, at last he spoke.
'You've not been yourself for days' he told her, 'not since the accident. You tried to take your own life.'
'I did?'
Cam nodded grimly. 'You could not face what had happened, and so…...' he broke off. 'It was nothing short of a miracle that you survived.'
'Why are you showing me this? Why are you telling me this?'
'I am leaving' Cam said to her. 'I wanted to make sure things were right here before I left.'
'I hate you…' Lucy whispered, turning away from him and balling her fists, shoulders hunched and body wracked with sobs. '*How could you do this to me?*'
Cam stared at her without reaction. He felt emotions stirring inside him, most of all it was guilt and self-loathing, but the drugs he had been taking that morning and so many days before that, had numbed everything inside. As he had intended.
'Please just kill me' Lucy begged, sobbing into her hands. 'I can't take the pain anymore. Kanae…...*my son*.....he was everything I had…'
'Lucy…'
Lucy whipped around glaring at him with disgust in her eyes.
'How could you do this to me? *I loved you…'*
Cam gritted his teeth, swallowing. He let out a slow breath.
'After what you did…' Lucy gasped, chest rising and falling, 'you're lucky I even look at you anymore.'
Cam's face contorted, unable to take anymore.
'Why are you the way you are?' Lucy cried, voice breaking now. 'How could you become this? How could you do the things that you do?! *Why are you like this?!'*
Cam broke down then, falling to his knees and sobbing into his hands.
'*Lucy! I cannot even express in words how sorry I am for what I have done!* It…it was an *accident*…. I swear I didn't know, I didn't know he was…he should have been at home…I

didn't mean to. I loved Kanae, I loved him. And I hate myself for what I have done, for so much more…and….' He gritted his teeth. 'No matter how much you hate me, it is only a fraction to how much I hate myself.' He raised his head to Lucy then, his metallic arms dropping to his side as he sat back on his heels, crying openly now as he stared at her.
'I can't bring back Kanae' he said, voice breaking, 'and I can't undo what I have done, no matter how hard I might wish it…'
'Why are you the way you are?' she cried. 'What happened to you?'
Cam gritted his teeth, whimpering pathetically.
'HOW COULD YOU DO THIS! WHY ARE YOU SO SCARED ALL THE TIME! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU TO MAKE YOU THIS WAY!'
'I was raped!'
Lucy fell into a shocked silence, taking a step away from him.
Cam drew a shuddering breath between his teeth, glaring through his tears now.
'I was raped' Cam said again. 'At a very young age. For years…by someone I should have been able to trust.' He bowed his head. 'My father couldn't help. My mother didn't care……. I was alone. Every day in those days I thought of suicide. I used to sit at the window in the tower….and look over the edge thinking about it. I was about to do it one day, until I saw you.' He took a deep breath. 'That look you gave me, when I saw you for the first time…it moved something inside me.' Cam looked up at her, tears streaming down his face. 'You were a pleasant dream Lucy' he sighed. 'You were the light, in a life that's been nothing but a tortuous nightmare. The pain I suffered almost every day was worth enduring…just to see you again…' Cam began to shake uncontrollably. 'I've never told anyone this before' he said. 'You are the only one I've ever truly loved…'
Cam took a deep breath, and met her eyes, rising to his feet now. 'You want to know why I am the way I am?' he said to her. 'You want to know why I have issues with trust, why I struggle to sleep, why I suffer nightmares. You want to know why my body is scared, why my arms are metallic, why I'm partially blind and deaf? Fine. I will tell you everything. I will tell you *everything*. I will leave nothing out. Not this time. It's time you knew the full truth. Its time you knew everything.'

Chapter Thirty-Five

That very night, Cam and Lucy packed up their things, loading everything they would need for the journey on three horses.
They left the home behind, riding side by side and moving swiftly across the land. They boarded the ship to sail across the sea, heading back to the capital, back to their old home.
Back to the palace.
Throughout the entire journey, Cam would from time to time see dark silhouettes in the distance, the shadows of the plague-masked figures.
Always silent. Always watching.

Lucy did not notice. But Cam saw. He could not miss it.
'Are you alright Cam?' Lucy said to him after a time.
'I…yes' he fumbled, glancing towards her briefly before looking away. 'I am fine.'
'How do you feel right now?' Lucy asked him.
Cam blinked slowly, his eyes distant as he stared across the open sea.
'I feel nothing.'

They travelled along the main road for the longest time, and at last they reached the capital, the main entrance where the great gates stood were right before them.
Cam stopped there for a moment, taking it all in.
'Cam?' Lucy asked him sadly, standing by his side.
'Yes' Cam mumbled.
Lucy stared at him. 'What are you doing?'
'I…' Cam swallowed, 'remembering.'
Lucy pursed her lips, blinking the tears from her eyes, so many emotions swelling inside as her heart beat painfully. 'Are we going inside then?'
Cam did not move.
'Cam?'
Cam turned his head slightly towards her.
'Yes' he said. 'I…' he gritted his teeth, facing the gates of the city again.
He took a step forward.
Cam and Lucy entered the city, walking slowly side by side. Cam glancing all about him as he went, feeling a very strong sense of nostalgia. It was so strange for him to be here once again, especially now that things were so different.
They walked for what felt like the longest time, doing so in complete silence, until they at last saw the palace before them.
Cam stopped in the middle of the street, staring up at the mighty building, as tall as it was.
'I remember' Cam mumbled as he stared at the building, 'the many many stairs…'
The palace was a very tall building indeed, towering over the other buildings around it. From a distance the palace looked as if it were made of glass, built with many towers, topped with sharp steeples that grew high into the sky like spears. A pale and in some places transparent building, that almost looked as if it had been built on the clouds, alongside the angels that sang there, a place where the seven gods themselves might live. It was truly a striking building, when people saw this building for the first time, it took their breath away, but to Cam who had grown up in it and lived such a miserable life within its prison walls, it was nothing.
Cam bowed his head then, hand going to his eyes.
'Are you alright?' Lucy asked him again.
'Yeah' Cam groaned, rubbing his face. 'It's just…my eyes. I still struggle to see….and the ringing in my ears never goes away.'
'Cam?'

Cam turned his head to the other side, seeing the figure of Vergil standing there. But Vergil was invisible, to everyone save for Cam.
'It's ok' Vergil said to him with a smile. 'You can do this. I have faith in you.'
Cam stared at him, for several moments he did nothing.
He blinked slowly, facing ahead again.
'I can do this' Cam spoke to the air. 'This is nothing.'

He entered the palace and found each and every single member of the council.
They could not hide from him.
'If anything, I should thank you' Cam said to him. 'Because of the suffering, the suffering that started with your dreadful council, I was able to become a better and stronger person than I ever would have been without you. It's kind of funny if you think about it' Cam added in a mumble, speaking to himself. 'Hm.'
'Please don't do this!' Tarant begged of him.
'This is your chance of dignity in your last moments of life' Cam answered. 'Now do you have any last words you would like me to pass onto your family?'
The man began to sob, bowing his head and shuddering.
'P-please!' one of the other council members spoke up. 'Tell my wife and children I love them, tell them I….I…..'
'Go on' Cam prompted. 'I promise I will listen, and I promise I will pass the message on.'
'Tell my daughter to continue with her music lessons. Tell my son to not let others bring him down… and tell my wife I'm sorry.'
'Anything else?' Cam asked in a flat voice.
The man unable to speak, just bowed and shook his head.
Cam turned his attention onto the others. 'Anyone else wish to speak one last time?'
There came no reply, only the frightened gaze of those who saw death within arm's reach, ready to embrace them.
'Think about the many others that died like this' Cam spoke to them. 'And know now how they suffered.'
He let his words hang in the air, staring back at the last few members of the council, the council that had caused him so much pain. Now they were nothing to him.
Cam let out a slow breath, blinking slowly.
The flames grew suddenly, igniting at their feet and burning quickly.
The men began to scream.
Cam glanced away, looking over the heads of those below him, the people gathered on the palace grounds to watch the men be executed.
Cam turned away as the fires raged, burning ever higher. He marched past the soldiers that stood at the balcony, watching silently, like stone, without emotion.
Cam marched down the corridor, slowing to a stop after several moments. By now he could no longer hear the screams of the dying men, only the ringing in his ears.
Cam was deep within the palace now, and everything was still, the palace was tranquil around him. It was utterly deserted here.

Cam saw movement in his sights then, raising his head slightly, he saw a figure moving down the stairs.
Cam blinked, bowing his head slightly as the figure approached. He narrowed his eyes, unable to see clearly who it was.
The figure stopped before him, standing frozen there in disbelief.
'…..Cam.'
Cam tensed slightly, eyes slowly widening as he nerves prickled inside him.
'Luke?'
Luke rushed up to him suddenly, embracing him tightly and sobbing into his shoulder.
'Oh gods I can't believe it's really you!' he cried, grasping him as if he were afraid to let him go, as if he were afraid that he might lost him again. 'Cam…'
Luke stepped back then, caressing Cam's face, his eyes traveling down his body.
'What happened to you?'
'Luke…' Cam mumbled, the edges of his eyes crinkling in a smile. 'I'm so glad to see you…it's been so long…'
'You've changed so much, I…. almost didn't recognise you….'
Luke took Cam's metallic hand in his own, then took his other hand, lifting them up and staring at them closely, brow furrowed.
He released Cam's hands, lifting his sleeves slowly, touching his arms, firmly grasping him.
'Your arms are metal' Luke mumbled. A pained expression crossed his face then as he looked back at his twin. '…. oh Cam.'
'It's been….' Cam spoke in a sober voice, 'a very long and difficult road.' He paused. 'But I am stronger than I have ever been before. I am no longer the weak and frightened victim that once was. I can fully control my magic now. I can do things you didn't even think were possible…I have travelled to other worlds….and….'
'At what cost?' Luke moaned sadly. 'I….' he sighed then, smiling widely suddenly. 'I'm so glad you're back at last' he whispered. 'I can hardly believe it…. I can hardly believe you're standing before me now. This almost feels like a dream.'
Cam blinked slowly, tilting his head and smiling back at Luke.
'I've missed you' Cam mumbled.
Luke took his face in his hands carefully then, bowing his head and resting his forehead against Cam's, smiling as a tear rolled down his cheek.
Luke raised his head and stepped back. Cam glanced over Luke's shoulder as he saw two figures standing behind Luke. He had not noticed these figures until Luke had stepped away, and Cam narrowed his eyes then, struggling to see them.
'I hope you have not forgotten' Luke said to Cam, '…. Valery.'
'Valery?' Cam breathed.
Luke stepped to the side as one of these figures approached, squinting at her as he tried to see.
'Hello Cam' the figure smiled.
Cam's eyes widened then.
'Valery?'
'Had you forgotten about me?' she asked him teasingly.
He hunched his shoulders, body shuddering as he reached out towards her.

‘Valery…i-is it really you?’
She took his hands in her own quickly, doing so without hesitation.
‘It’s so wonderful to see you’ she beamed, completely unphased by his drastically altered appearance. He had been handsome once upon a time. Now he was a monster, he was ugly.
‘I’ve missed you…’ Valery said. ‘I truly have. I thought for…for a time that we would never see you again. It’s been so long.’
‘I almost didn’t make it’ Cam told her. ‘On more than one occasion.’
Valery cupped his face then tenderly, smiling warmly, a genuine smile that reached her eyes.
‘I have missed you so dearly’ Valery breathed.
‘You’ve changed’ Cam mumbled. ‘You look….so different.’
She chuckled to herself as she lowered her hands again, straightening up.
‘I was younger when I first came to you’ she told him. ‘I am a woman now. And I…’ she smiled. ‘I have children. With Luke’ she said, turning to him and placing a hand upon his shoulder. ‘A boy and a girl.’
Cam blinked slowly as he began to process this.
The edges of Cam’s eyes crinkled then, and he began to laugh and cry at the same time, hand going to his face.
‘I’m so happy’ he gasped, finally getting control of himself. ‘This is…...*wonderful*.’
Luke and Valery turned then to look behind them, as the last figure yet to be introduced, approached and made herself known.
‘Hello Cam.’
‘Mother?’
Miranda smiled affectionately at her son.
‘I’m glad to see you remember me’ she told him, before stepping forward to embrace him.
‘I’m so proud of you’ she whispered into his ear.
‘Are you?’ Cam asked her flatly as she let go of him, stepping back again. ‘I’ve don’t horrible things. Are you proud of me? What would father think if he were here to see me now? He would be ashamed and disgusted at what I have allowed to happen, what I have done and what I have become. I’m a monster.’
Miranda said nothing, but watched him silently, a smile upon her lips. She was happy, genuinely happy.
‘I’m glad to see you back’ she told him sincerely.
Cam laughed to himself, glancing away from her then. ‘Yes’ he said. ‘And a part of me is glad to see you too.’
She smiled wider at that.
‘Let us complete this reunion, shall we?’ a mysterious voice spoke up all of a sudden, and the others glanced around to see a figure approach them, a figure clad all in black, face covered by a plague mask.
‘Hello Vergil’ Cam said to the figure in a monotone, recognising his voice.
Vergil smiled to Cam behind his mask, glancing back at Lucy who followed a few steps behind him.
‘Oh my gods’ Luke gasped, staring at her in shock and surprise as memories began to stir inside him at the sight of her. ‘Are you…...do I know you?’

‘Yes, you do’ Lucy replied. ‘I assume you are Luke, Cam’s twin brother? I am Lucy. The girl who um…. who you met when you were leaving the palace? When you were part of the guild of thieves. Back when we were all children.’
‘Oh my gods’ Luke laughed then, hand going to his head. ‘I cannot believe it! Is it really you?’
‘What are you talking about?’ Miranda asked flatly. ‘You were part of a guild, were you?’ she asked her sons.
‘We used to leave the palace remember?’ Luke said to her.
‘Yeah’ Cam added flatly. ‘If I remember correctly you beat me half to death for it.’
‘Oh yeah’ Miranda said, casting her mind back. ‘I remember now’ she smiled. ‘So, who is this?’ she turned her eyes onto Lucy, as beside her Valery watched silently.
‘Long story short’ Cam grumbled. ‘We’ve met several times in the past, our paths seem to always cross’ he said tilting his head towards Lucy as he spoke. ‘We first met when we were children, and….’
‘So, she’s your lover?’ Miranda asked, her eyes roving all over Lucy’s body as she analysed her. Lucy was not intimidated.
‘Yes’ Lucy answered. ‘And you are just as I thought you would be.’
‘Ha! What’s *that* supposed to mean?’ Miranda asked with amusement.
‘I am taking over the palace’ Cam interrupted, speaking loudly now. ‘I am…. going to correct all my mistakes…by bloodshed.’
‘Good for you!’ Miranda cried. ‘I’m happy for you. Really I am. Now shall we all have a drink together. I’m hungry. Let’s all have a drink together. Oh, and Valery you should bring your children to show Cam. They’re so cute’ she said speaking to Cam.
‘Miranda has been a wonderful guardian for my children’ Valery told him, stepping up to her and hugging her tightly. ‘I love Miranda like my own mother.’
‘Hmp’ Cam made a noise. ‘She never had interest in her own children.’
‘Yeah but you haven’t seen these two’ Miranda countered, speaking enthusiastically. ‘Valery’s two are so cute!’
‘And we weren’t?’ Luke questioned his mother.
‘I need a drink’ she replied shortly, taking Valery by the hand and leading her away. ‘Let’s go!’
Luke hesitated for a moment, smiling back at Cam, before following after her. Cam glanced back at Lucy uncertainly.
‘Coming?’
‘Yeah’ she replied. ‘I’m coming.’
‘So, who is that masked figure?’ Miranda asked suddenly, calling loudly back at Cam as she led the way. ‘He seemed to know you.’
‘He’s just a person’ Cam replied flatly. ‘Nothing more.’

Cam walked with the others, joining them in one of the palace’s many halls where they ate together.
‘Just like a family’ Miranda smiled cheerfully, lifting a glass of wine.
Beside her Valery raised her own glass, clinking it with Miranda’s.

‘Like we’ve never been before’ Miranda finished.
‘You’re thriving on this’ Cam said to her flatly. ‘Aren’t you.’
‘I’m just glad to see you back’ Miranda said to him. ‘We all are.’
Luke sitting beside her reached out and grasped her hand fondly, turning back towards Cam and Lucy who sat side by side.
‘Things have been peaceful here’ Luke told Cam. ‘I mean at least for us. I know things have been difficult with the council, but we have been left alone here to live as we please.’
‘Those strange masked figures’ Valery spoke up turning to Cam, ‘they’ve never been far away, and I know it’s strange but…I feel comfort around them.’
‘Well…’ Cam said quietly turning to glance at Lucy who sat quietly by his side. ‘I…yes’ he finished. ‘They um…’ he smiled to himself then. ‘Do you remember auntie?’ he asked Luke suddenly.
‘Auntie?’ Luke echoed.
‘Shortly after father died’ Cam said, ‘we left the palace in secret and ran along the beach. Do you remember? Upon the cliffs we saw a masked figure. She called herself *Auntie*.’
‘Oh gods’ Luke mumbled. ‘I…I remember now. Gods’ he said again. ‘I completely forgot about her, but yes….’ He trailed off. ‘I cannot remember her face’ he spoke in a mumble to himself. ‘All I remember is that she was incredibly beautiful.’
Miranda frowned at her son as she listened with deep interest, but she didn’t speak.
‘They’ve followed me my entire life near enough’ Cam said. ‘Ever since father died.’
‘Maybe they have a purpose for you’ Luke suggested. ‘I now believe there is far more to this world than I thought. You’ve travelled to other worlds.’
Cam blinked slowly, lowering his eyes to his plate.
‘I don’t know what they want. I doubt even they do, and I doubt there is a purpose to anything.’
‘What was it that you saw?’ Luke asked him. ‘And…. what happened to your arms?’
Cam let out a heavy sigh, leaning forwards with his elbows on the table, his metallic hands woven together, each mismatched from the other.
‘I will tell you the whole story’ Cam said to them, ‘I will tell you all of what I saw in the other worlds. How I became….’ he paused, ‘what I am now.’
‘I would be very interested to hear it’ Valery said to him.
‘Would you now’ Cam spoke sombrely. ‘I’m afraid… it isn’t the nicest story you’ve heard.’

After they had finished eating, Cam and Lucy went away together for a short time, speaking briefly, before Lucy went to bed on her own.
They had a room together now that they would share, and Lucy felt exhausted.
‘Will I be safe here’ Lucy had asked him.
‘Yes’ Cam told her. ‘I have the utmost confidence. Everything is going to be ok now. Everything is going to be ok in the end.’
‘Alright’ Lucy breathed. ‘I trust you.’
Lucy went to bed, and Cam walked with Luke slowly through the palace, Valery and Miranda trailing calmly after them a few steps behind.
They headed to the higher levels, to the tower that once used to be the only place from which the young Cam and Luke could see the outside world.

Miranda sat on the wall atop the tower, the large moon behind her shone like an orb in the dark sky.
It was beautiful out tonight, and peaceful, but sort of eerie at the same time.
Valery and Luke sat upon the ground at Miranda's feet, as Cam sat down facing them all.
'This is so surreal for me' Cam began, staring back at them all. 'I don't really know where to begin.'
'I think it's nice' Miranda spoke quietly. Though her voice was easily heard in the silence that pressed around them. 'I this this is a wonderful thing. I am happy with the way things are… as strange as that might sound.'
'I have a lot to tell you' Cam began, his voice low. 'I…. I don't know where to begin….I don't know….how….'
'Why don't you begin with the day you first disappeared?' Luke suggested. 'Do you remember? We were taking a ship across the waters to the other land, when we were searching for Lucy. A masked figure came for you.'
'Yes, I remember' Cam grumbled. 'I…' he trailed off in thought then. 'I um…. I guess that would be a good place to start.'
Miranda leant forward as she sat upon the wall, resting with her elbows on her knees as she slumped in a very unlady-like fashion, leaning forwards with a drink in her hands. She was always drinking these days and was rarely without wine in her hand.
'That masked figure' Cam began. 'Wonderland I think she said her name was. They change their names so often, even their faces sometimes. I can hardly keep track of them, the only one I know is….' Cam blinked slowly. 'Vergil' he finished. 'That is the one I am closest to.'
'A friend of yours?' Miranda asked him.
'Yeah' Cam replied non-committedly.
'So what happened?' Valery asked him. 'You left to find the woman you love. And before you could you were stopped by this masked figure. Is that right? Wonderland was her name. That is as much as Luke told me anyway.'
'Yes' Cam replied. 'I was not able to see her, to see Lucy. The masked figures told me that Lucy was safe. But I did not get a chance to see her for myself at that time. They wanted to take me away to visit other worlds, to experience more, things that would force my powers out, and I learned to control them, now using my magic is as easy for me as it is to breath. But it was very difficult getting there.' He took a deep breath. 'The first world I came to, was one they called 'Bloodsin', it was a future-world, one far more advanced than our own. And this is where I met ghouls, human-looking creatures. But they were not human. They fed on human flesh.'
Cam cast his mind back, remembering the ghoul Nathan, who was dead now. He had initially treated Cam as food, nothing but prey. But in the end, Cam would have said that they had become friends.
'When I first stepped out into this first world, this new world' Cam said to the others, raising his head. 'Ah.' He smiled then. 'Well…let me think now. This is going to take all of my thoughts. I have to describe this well, in order to convey truly what I felt and saw around me, all of those many wonderful things. There is nothing in this world to compare those things to, but I will try my best to explain…'

Cam was exhausted by the time he had finished his long tale, and he had explained everything that had happened to him, the other worlds, Beloved, how he lost his arms. His mind felt so mentally drained, having to re-live everything he had been through, the good and the bad. The creature Beloved was the thing that stuck most in his mind above all else.
I hope she is alright Cam thought to himself not for the first time.

The sun was beginning to rise now, and as Cam opened the door to the room he and Lucy shared, he saw her lying on the bed, peaceful and still.
Cam felt a sudden presence in the room, and he glanced to the side, seeing a masked figure standing in the corner amongst the shadow. The figure vanished seconds later in the blink of an eye.
Cam diverted his attention away from this corner and back towards Lucy.
He approached her, moving slowly towards the bed.
Leaning over her, he brushed her cheek tenderly, the metallic touch of his fingers were cold.
Lucy opened her eyes.
'….Cam?'
'Don't get up' he told her quietly. 'Everything is fine.'
She rested her head back onto the bed, blinking tiredly up at him.
'Are you ok?' she asked him.
'Yes. Everything is fine.'
'You didn't come to bed.'
'No' he whispered back. 'I was…catching up.' He smiled weakly then. 'It is good to see my family again.'
Lucy closed her eyes then, sighing deeply.
'Good' she said to him in a quiet voice. 'I'm glad.' She opened her eyes a moment later, watching him. 'What are you going to do now? Are you coming to bed?'
'No' Cam whispered back.
'You're not going to sleep?'
'I am going to see my niece and nephew.'
Lucy sat up then slowly, pushing the sheets back a little.
'I should probably get up now' she told him.
'You don't have to.'
'I'm feeling hungry.'
Cam nodded to her.
'We can have breakfast together' he spoke in a hushed voice.
'Let me change' Lucy told him, 'and I will be there shortly.'
Cam left her alone, going on ahead to the breakfast hall. As usual the servants were awake early, they cooked quickly upon Cam's arrival and brought plenty of food out for him to choose for himself what he wanted. Cam stared at all of it with disinterest.
By the time Lucy came along, there was plenty of food on the table them both.
'I can't eat all of this' she told him.

‘You don’t have to.’
‘Won’t it be a waste?’
Cam sighed wearily.
‘The servants eat a lot of the left overs’ he told her. ‘The rest gets fed to the dogs.’
‘What dogs?’
‘There’s a kennel in the palace grounds. Hounds used for hunting. They eat mostly scraps.’
‘Do you hunt?’ Lucy asked him.
‘No’ Cam mumbled. ‘I’ve never had the pleasure. I mean…. I’ve never had much of a taste for it. I know some do it as leisure, because they enjoy it. But I don’t see the appeal.’
‘My father used to hunt all the time’ Lucy told him. ‘He and my brothers. It kept us alive during the difficult times…. we would have starved otherwise.’
‘I understand that’ Cam replied. ‘I just don’t see the appeal of going out to hunt an animal just for the fun of it. I think it’s sort of barbaric.’ He laughed at himself suddenly. ‘I’m such a hypocrite’ he voiced, and then said no more.

Later that day, Cam met his brother’s children for the first time.
Miranda opened the door, and the children came running in excitedly, they were not shy at all.
Cam thought immediately at that point, how different they both were from his own child. They were not timid like Kanae had been, but bold.
Cam was surprised as he watched them, they ran around the room, highly energetic.
Miranda chuckled happily then, kneeling. Both children suddenly ran to her, embracing her tightly. Cam was very surprised by this, not expecting to see such a thing. He was surprised to see her showing affection towards the children.
‘This is Roy’ Miranda said, looking to the boy she held him in one arm, as behind her, Valery and Luke stood side by side, looking on with smiles. ‘He is four years old’ Miranda continued, hugging the boy to her, ‘and this’ she said turning to the girl, ‘is Lily.’
Miranda kissed the girl on the cheek, and the child giggled with delight.
‘She is three years old’ Miranda beamed with pride.
‘Who is that?’ Roy asked, staring up at Cam.
‘This’ Miranda said smiling at him. ‘This is Cameron, the king, and your uncle.’
‘How come we’ve not seen him before?’ the little girl Lily asked.
‘He’s been away’ Miranda said, squeezing the girl to her, resting her head upon the child’s, ‘he’s been away for quite a long time.’
Miranda lifted her head then, smiling warmly to her son.
‘And now he’s back’ Miranda said. ‘And he is here to stay.’ Her smile grew wider. ‘Isn’t that right?’
‘Yes’ Cam breathed. ‘I…. I will not leave again. Everything that’s happened…’ he grimaced then, swallowing the lump in his throat, ‘it always brings me back to the palace.’
‘What happened to your arms?’ Roy called out, eyes wide like dinner plates as he glanced from each of Cam’s arms to the other and back again.
‘They were ripped from me’ Cam spoke in a mumble.

‘Cool!’ Lily cried happily.
Cam stared down at the child in disbelief.
‘Cam’ Miranda suggested politely, ‘why don’t you show the children your arms?’
‘Yeah let us see’ Lily said to him.
‘Kneel down’ Miranda said to him. ‘They can reach you better, they are only little.’
Cam pursed his lips then, going down on one knee.
The children let go of Miranda, dashing over to Cam.
They immediately began to touch him, hands running down his arms as they pulled up his sleeves to get a better look.
‘It’s so strange’ Roy said staring at the right metallic arm, the cold silver sheets, lacking any natural warmth.
‘I’ve never seen anything like that’ Lily said, looking up at Cam then, right into his eyes. ‘Why are your eye white? And why is your skin rough?’
Cam stared at Lily then in surprise, unable to speak, unsure of what to say.
‘It’s ok’ Miranda told him, still kneeling behind the children. ‘You can tell them the truth.’
Cam looked back at the young girl then, speaking slowly.
‘Fire tore me apart’ he said. ‘An explosion. I cannot see clearly anymore, nor can I hear.’
‘You are like one of the monsters in my stories I read’ Roy voiced.
Cam turned to the boy. ‘You read?’
‘Yeah, I love books, do you?’
Cam smiled then, lifting his head to his brother.
Cam was happy.

The children began to run all about the room in excitement, a pure joy that came from within them. Their parents Luke and Valery watched their children with pride.
Miranda who had been sitting on the floor beside Cam rose to her feet, calling Lily to her, and immediately the girl turned and ran into her open arms.
Miranda lifted Lily into the air, kissing her cheek as Lily giggled in delight.
Cam found this strange.
Roy immediately ran to her and began tugging on her dress, indicating he wanted to be picked up too. Miranda reached down, lifting Roy with her other arm and holding both children close.
‘I’m surprised you have the strength to do that’ Cam said to her.
‘What do you mean?’ Miranda asked him.
‘Years ago, when the council tried to poison you’ Cam replied. ‘You became very weak.’
‘I have made myself stronger’ she gleamed at him. ‘I am happier now than I ever have been before. Life is wonderful, even better now with you home at last. Now you can finally make things right. I can’t wait to see more of them die. This is going to be so much fun.’
‘Who’s going to die?’ Lily asked.
‘All the bad people’ Miranda told her affectionately nuzzling into her. ‘They are all going to die horrible deaths. Your uncle Cam is going to make it happen.’
‘You can do that?’ Lily asked Cam.

‘Yes’ Cam replied. ‘I can do anything.’
‘That’s amazing’ Roy cried out. ‘I want to be able to do that. There are a lot of bad people in the kingdom.’
‘Is that what you’ve been told?’ Cam asked the boy. ‘Well it’s true. They were allowed to thrive because of me. Now I have to put a stop to it.’
‘That sounds like fun’ Roy laughed.
Cam raised his head to the child, watching him closely.
‘They are good children’ Miranda said to Cam, putting them backdown again. ‘I love them both dearly.’
‘Miranda has done a wonderful job caring for them’ Valery said, glancing to her with adoration in her eyes. ‘I would be lost without her. It has been very difficult at times with two children, but Miranda has helped me so much.’
‘So, you’ve been left alone to live a peaceful life’ Cam said.
‘The council left us alone’ Miranda replied. ‘We have been existing here peacefully, and it has been wonderful.’
Cam smiled at his mother then, feeling warmth stirring in his heart.
‘You do look happier’ he told her. ‘I am…...I am glad…’
Miranda giggled then, in a very childish manner.
‘I can’t wait for the days to come’ Miranda breathed excitedly. ‘I can’t wait to see them *burn*.’
‘Can we come along?’ Lily asked. ‘Can we watch?’
Cam dipped his head at the child. ‘I don’t think…’
‘It’s ok’ Roy spoke up. ‘We are not afraid.’
Cam considered the two children as they stood before him now, watching him eagerly.
Neither child was afraid of Cam, not in the slightest, not like Kanae had been.
‘I will be away from the palace for a long time once this begins’ Cam told them all. ‘You will have to stay here.’
They watched him in silently without reaction, all four of them, until at last Valery spoke.
‘Come on children’ she said ushering them away. ‘It’s time for bed.’
Neither of them protested like Cam thought they would. Instead they walked together obediently, followed by Miranda and Valery.
I should go too’ Luke said to him. ‘Those children’ he sighed, ‘they’ve been awake all night.’ He gave Cam a gentle smile. ‘I’ll see you next time’ he said to him. It was nice to meet Lucy again.’
‘Yeah’ Cam nodded shortly. ‘I am glad she is here.’
Luke lingered for a moment longer, before silently turning and walking away.

Cam was left alone once more, wondering what to do, wondering where Lucy was now.
He decided to go back to his room to rest, he felt so very tired, having not slept at all in the longest time.

Cam turned slowly, making his way gradually through the palace and up and down its many stairs.
He returned to his room, lying back on the bed without bothering to get undressed. He stared up at the ceiling for a few moments, before letting out a heavy sigh and closing his eyes.
He was asleep minutes later, only to be woken again by a feeling around him. He felt something in the air, a presence.
Cam opened his eyes, seeing a figure hovering in the air above him, hanging there, her body horizontal to his own.
Cam blinked slowly as he saw her there, recognising her.
'Wonderland' he breathed. 'One of the eight.'
She gleamed at him, lowering in the air, her body tilting until she stood vertically.
Cam sat up to see her properly.
'What are you doing here?' he asked her.
'I don't know' she mumbled. 'I suppose I just wanted to see you.'
'Why?'
'I can't explain it' Wonderland replied. 'I just feel a strange sort of attachment towards you.'
'What is it with you lot?' Cam asked her. 'All of you, you are such strange characters.'
Wonderland dipped her fairy wings slowly, leaning forwards and smiling at him.
'I feel the magic inside you is strong, it feels like…. standing before a furnace. You are blazing.'
Cam tilted his head very slowly towards her, regarding her silently.
'You really are incredible' she told him breathlessly. 'I feel a strong desire to be by your side and I don't know why….'
She giggled then, hunching her shoulders and spinning once on the spot, her wings bending slightly as she turned.
There is something happening outside' Wonderland told him. 'There is fighting in the streets.'
'What?'
'You didn't think you could just return home and just kill all the bad people did you? Their influence has deepened greatly over the years they've been in control' Wonderland told him.
'Their propaganda…. their brainwashing…' Wonderland gave a wolfish smile. 'It has had such a profound effect on people. It is ingrained into them. They know nothing else.'
'What are you saying?' Cam asked the fairy.
'I'm saying there are people who will resist you. There are many who hate you now for what you have done, and for what you are about to do. But these are not evil people, you could even see them as victims. They have been brainwashed by the council. The used religion to control people. So many are now so set in their ways that they would be more than willing to die for what they believe in.' Wonderland lifted her chin. 'They would die for an idea.'
'I…' Cam shook his head. 'I…'
'There are riots in the streets' Wonderland said turning away from him. 'People are fighting each other. Some support you, others see you as a monster.' She winked at him, eyes shining bright with excitement. 'Some are beginning to worship you as a living god.'
'A god?' Cam echoed.

‘All the people who supported the reign of your father are gone now, but there are new people in their place, people who knew nothing about him and yet still could see that the world was wrong. These are the ones who support you now. They adore you. The first words of *god* began to ring out that day you burned the last few members of the council alive, and they have been spreading like *fire*.’ Wonderland laughed at herself, holding her hands over her mouth. ‘There will be so much fire’ she continued to giggle, ‘and I mean that in many different ways.’

Cam raised an eyebrow at her.

‘I will be a god’ Cam answered. ‘I will be the god that this world needs. Never again will the weak have to live in fear. I will be a true and ruthless god, stronger than the gods this kingdom currently bows down to. They are nothing but an idea, my reach will be far, and my effects will be more profound.’

‘Are you going to get rid of the old gods?’ Wonderland asked him.

‘No’ Cam replied. ‘People can believe what they want, if it gives them comfort, who am I to take that away.’

‘You are the most powerful being in this entire world’ Wonderland said to him. ‘You can do whatever you want, and if that means taking the old gods away that people adore, you could do that too.’

‘It doesn’t mean I should’ Cam replied. ‘People believe the gods created the world and everything we know.’ He shrugged. ‘Who knows how life and existence came to be. Who am I to dispute that, if people want to believe the goddess Mirco created the land, then they are welcome to.’

‘So what are you going to do?’ Wonderland asked him. ‘The people are killing each other in the streets. Your arrival has caused disruption, yes, the council were evil but…at least there was balance, people knew where they were. Now with your return there is unrest, the balance has been tipped, and people are trying to find it again, they are scrambling for the top. Each man is trying to find their place. Everybody wants power…’

Cam turned away from her, facing the window in the room. He marched over towards it, standing before it and staring outwards.

‘Are those fires’ he asked Wonderland who stood behind him. ‘Is that smoke?

‘Yes’ Wonderland replied, stepping closer to him. ‘There are many fires.’

‘I need to think about this’ Cam mumbled. ‘There is a lot…. I have to consider…. I have to…. I have to think about how to proceed.’

‘I am here for you’ Wonderland told him.

‘Can you help me?’

‘Of course I can’ she replied sincerely. ‘I will be here whenever you need me. Just say my name and I shall appear.’

Cam turned away again, looking back through the window.

‘…...Thank you.’

Cam stood silently at the window for several moments, simply staring through the glass towards the outside world. And then his mind began to wander.

‘At least now I can leave these walls whenever I please. Wait a moment’ he said lifting his head slightly. ‘When did they change the glass? It used to be warped so that Luke and I as children could not look out.’

The door to the room opened then, and Luke stood there.
'Cam' he gasped. 'There's fighting in the streets.'
'I know' Cam replied calmly. 'I will see to it.'
'What are you doing?' Luke asked him breathlessly.
'I'm thinking.'
'Cam please people are dying.'
'I know' Cam answered quietly and calmly. 'I can't just use my power, I need to consider carefully how to overcome this problem.'
Within the room, Wonderland looked on silently, before vanishing altogether in the blink of an eye.
Luke stood at the door, staring into the room at his brother.
'Cam' he breathed. 'What are you going to do?'
'Not panic for a start' Cam answered shortly. 'And not act rashly either. I need to think about this.'
Luke narrowed his eyes in uncertainty, tilting his head.
'Is everything alright?'
'Yes' Cam answered quietly after a time. 'Everything is…. everything is…' he trailed off, but never finished his sentence.
Luke stared at him, taking a step back out of the room and into the corridor, seeing his son standing there.
'Daddy!'
'Roy, what are you doing here?' Luke said to him.
'What is going on?'
Luke approached the boy, lifting him in his arms.
'You should go back to your room.'
'But why?' Roy asked his father. 'I want to see what's going on.'
'Its dangerous out in the streets right now' Luke told his son. 'People are dying.'
'I want to see' Roy breathed excitedly
'No Roy.'
'Luke?'
Luke saw his mother appear from around the corner.
'Roy' Miranda tutted, 'there you are. Haven't I told you not to run off like that?'
'But it's safe here' Roy said to Miranda, shifting awkwardly in Luke's arms.
'Stop that. You could fall and hurt yourself' Miranda told him sternly
'No' Roy shook his head. 'The masked figures will watch over us. Lily and I are completely safe.'
Miranda frowned at the boy with disapproval.
'You should never depend on other people' Miranda told him. 'That sort of behaviour and mindset could get you hurt or killed.'
'It has not so far' Roy replied.
'And things always change.'
Roy could think of nothing to say.
Miranda looked past Luke and into Cam's room then, seeing him still standing there, staring out of the window, still as if frozen in time.

‘I…’ Luke spoke up. ‘I’m going to talk to Cam’ he said putting Roy back down. ‘Where is Lily?’
‘With Valery’ Miranda replied, not taking her eyes off Cam.
‘Could you take Roy,’ Luke asked his mother, ‘and keep him safe?’
‘Of course,’ Miranda whispered. ‘What are you going to do?’
Luke looked over his mother’s shoulder, seeing a plague masked figure standing on one of the balconies above, watching silently.
‘I am going to stay with Cam’ he replied. ‘I’ve missed him, for all these years….and I want to stay by his side and….’
‘Catch up on lost time?’
‘Yeah’ Luke mumbled with a nod.
‘I understand’ Miranda said. ‘You should go.’
She took Roy by the hand, leading him away up the stairs and towards the higher floors where his own room was.
Luke glanced back towards Cam’s room. He gritted his teeth, thinking.
He strode into the room, stopping behind him.
Cam had not moved in all this time but continued to stare through the window as if trapped in a daze.
‘Cam’ Luke spoke firmly.
Cam raised his head.
‘Cam?’
‘Yes.’
‘We should go out into the streets.’
‘You want to come with me?’ Cam asked him.
‘Of course.’
‘Well there is no danger’ Cam replied carelessly. ‘Fine, if you want.’
Luke noticed suddenly then, how different his brother’s demeanour was, he was so far removed to the person he used to know, it was almost like talking to someone else entirely new.
‘I don’t know what I can do’ Cam voiced, as Luke made to step back. ‘I…I don’t know how to control the people.’
‘Let’s go at least’ Luke said to him, ‘and take a look.’ He paused, waiting for Cam to react, he didn’t. ‘We should hurry’ Luke said.
Cam only blinked tiredly, staring out at the world through the glass, and seeing only a red haze before him.

Luke marched with Cam out into the streets, struggling to keep up with Cam’s pace, he did not stop as he made his way forward, heading to a place that only he knew.
Cam stopped after walking for several minutes, standing now in the thick of the fray. All around them the people were fighting viciously, the riots in the streets were even worse now than before, as the rage and frustration of the people increased.

Luke stared in shock as he saw a man nearby, forcing another man's head into a barrel of water and drowning him. Nearby there was another dead man, blood pooled around his body and head.
Everything was loud around them. It was mayhem and chaos. Luke could not help but feel a little afraid.
Luke looked back to the drowning man, furrowing his brow and gritting his teeth, feeling suddenly sick and disorientated as he watched. The man holding the other man's head below the water in the barrel drew back suddenly, gasping in pain and holding his hands to his chest.
The man he had been holding down threw his head back out of the water, gasping and retching. He had been saved, having been seconds away from running out of breath.
Luke glanced back around to Cam, wide eyed in disbelief as he saw Cam's feet leave the ground.
He stumbled back. Watching as Cam shot towards the sky, flying through the air.
'Oh gods' Luke uttered, his throat dry and heart pounding in his chest, 'how…how is this possible…?'

Cam lowered in the air again, coming to land lightly on the roof of a tower, staring down at the streets of the city around him, eyes dead. He was emotionless inside.
He felt a presence by his side then, glancing around and seeing a figure standing there.
Wonderland gleamed back at him happily, lifting her shoulders playfully. She wasn't wearing her cloak or mask now, but instead showed herself as who she was. Her top was low cut, leaving her back bare, so that her wings could be free.
Wonderland stood beside Cam, holding her hands before her and grinning widely at him.
Cam looked away again.
Wonderland stepped forwards, leaning over the edge of the roof and looking down at the streets below as Cam remained where he was, eyes lowered to the ground.
He could not see anything around him, not clearly anyway. But there was so much that he could *feel* all around. Inside him, he felt all the pain and turmoil, the suffering, he felt several people die, felt their fear, felt the life ebb away from their bodies, leaving behind only a shell that in time would rot into nothingness.
Cam blinked slowly.
Beside him, Wonderland's green wings began to glow with vivid yellow streaks, as the magic grew within her, coursing through her veins as she gazed all around her excitedly.

Interlude start

The woman fell to her knees, sobbing into her hands. The trail of her long dress hanging off the edge of the grey cliff she knelt upon, the rocks cutting her knees.
The skirt of her dress made entirely of black feathers, lifted in the breeze, the waves thrashed against the rocks below her, the moisture was heavy in the air.
The woman raised her head, hands over her eyes, tears streaming down her cheeks. She gritted her teeth, choking back a sob, before bowing her head again, shoulders hunched

Interlude end

It was late now, and Cam was back at the palace. Everything was, peaceful now. Such a contrast to what had been in the city before, and eerie silence fell about the world, like a blanket, hushing everything and making it dull.
This strange sort of peace was something that could have been called normal, though Cam had not been at the palace long enough to know what was normal anymore.
Cam sat at the table between Lucy and Luke, they were eating their food quietly, without looking up or speaking.
Across the table, Valery and Miranda were laughing together and talking animatedly. They both adored each other, and in only a very short time, had grown so close to one another, they had become almost like sisters. All the bad things that happened in the world now did not phase them, they cared only about their own small family, living in their own little world within the palace. They rarely left nowadays.
'Can you pass that?' Miranda asked suddenly, speaking up a little.
Cam glanced up then, lost in thought.
'What?'
'That wine bottle' Miranda said.
Cam passed it to her.
'Great' Miranda gasped happily. 'If you guys aren't having any more, then I will have it for myself.' She uncorked the bottle with ease, drinking deeply from it before putting it heavily back on the table. 'You all look so dreary' Miranda said to them. 'So, did you get it fixed?' Miranda asked, addressed Cam now.
'What?' Cam mumbled. 'Um…fixed?'
'Something was happening in the streets yes?' Miranda prompted. 'Did you do what you needed to do to get it sorted?
'No' Cam replied flatly.
'Well that's too bad' Miranda said carelessly. 'Do you want dessert?' she asked Valery cheerily.
'Oh no thank you' Valery giggled a little drunkardly, 'I'm full already.'
Miranda smiled warmly at her, before turning her eyes onto the others.

‘Now why do you all look so down?’ she asked them sullenly. ‘You’re bringing down the mood. Valery and I are trying to have an enjoyable meal.’
Lucy raised her head silently towards Miranda then, an expression of concern on her face. She had hardly touched her food.
‘Did you not see what was happening?’ Luke asked his mother angrily then.
‘You mean…. was it riots? I don’t really know’ Miranda mumbled. ‘I found it boring.’
‘People were dying in the streets’ Luke told her glaring. ‘There were…fires…buildings destroyed…’
‘People are always dying somewhere’ Miranda spoke carelessly as Lucy continued to watch her silently. ‘You act like this is something new. Don’t make it a big deal out of it.’
Luke groaned then, turning away. ‘I don’t have the time nor energy to get annoyed with you anymore.’
‘Hey where are you going?’ Miranda asked, sounding disappointed as Luke rose to his feet.
‘I need some time alone, both of you girls just sit here and continue to drink wine.’
‘I hope you’re not mad at me?’ Valery spoke up, lifting the glass of wine to her lips.
‘I just need some time alone’ Luke replied sullenly.
Cam raised his head, glancing around then towards the door.
It was at that moment the children ran in.
‘Shouldn’t you be in bed?’ Miranda asked them as they began chasing each other around the table in circles. ‘Silly children. Always so much energy…’
She watched them with joy as they laughed and shrieked in delight, playing tag as they dashed back and forth. Valery reached out and grabbed Lily as she ran by, pulling her onto her lap and hugging her as Roy continued to run past. Luke grabbed him, putting him on his lap too.
‘You’ve been getting into so much trouble lately’ Luke told his son. ‘I was sure I locked your room. How did you get out?’
‘The angel let us out’ Roy grinned happily.
‘Angel?’ Luke echoed uncertainly.
‘Yeah’ Lily beamed. ‘The one in the mask.’
Valery frowned at that, glancing across the table at Luke.
The door to the dining hall opened for the second time, and another figure came strolling in.
Cam and Lucy barely registered her presence as Wonderland approached the table, stopping before it.
‘And who are you?’ Miranda asked the young female figure, before taking a deep swig from her bottle and banging it on the table again.
She wore no black this time, but clothes that showed a lot of skin, clothes that were many bright and beautiful colours.
‘You’ve probably never seen our kind without a mask’ Wonderland said to them all. ‘Well except for you of course’ she said to Cam teasingly.
‘Oh’ Luke mumbled.
‘What are you doing here?’ Cam asked her in a low tone. ‘Wonderland.’
‘Is this the angel?’ Luke asked his children.
‘Yes’ they both replied happily.
‘Look at her wings’ Lily giggled as she pointed.

Wonderland chuckled happily in response to that, waving happily back at Lily, who waved to her in turn, her beautiful green wings batting slowly, glowing fabulously, sparkling and glistening.
'Hey wait a minute' Luke voiced suddenly. 'I have seen you before.'
'Indeed you have' Wonderland nodded approvingly, thoroughly pleased with herself. 'I was the one to first take Cam away to the other world. When you were on that boat travelling across the waters in search of Lucy.'
'Why are you letting my children out of their room?' Luke asked her flatly.
'They were bored. And I wanted to see them. They are so cute after all, with wonderful personalities. You're lucky to have children like that. If I could have children I would want them to be just like Roy and Lily. Aren't you two just adorable?!' she said to them excitedly.
'And now I suddenly remember Auntie' Cam mumbled.
'Who?' Wonderland asked.
'Doesn't matter' Cam droned.
'So' Wonderland moved on, her attention diverting towards Lucy now. 'Lucy how are you settling in? You're rather quiet a lot of the time.'
'I…am fine' she replied tiredly. 'It's just so different for me, that's all. I've never been inside the palace before this.'
'It's pretty big in here isn't it?' Wonderland said enthusiastically. 'Most of the space is unused, and there are so many stairs!'
'Why are you here?' Cam asked her.
'I'm here to help.'
Cam reached forwards, taking his cup and drinking from it deeply.
'You need' Wonderland said to him, 'a new council.'
'A new council?' Luke spoke up, still holding Roy on his lap before him, the child was still now, watching silently the adults around him.
Wonderland's eyes shone brightly.
'Your very own council' she went on, 'made up of people you *trust*.'
'If that is what you think is best' Cam replied non-committedly.
'You cannot run this country alone.'
'It's not only this country you will run' Cam told her, 'but this entire world.'
'Oh?' Wonderland purred, taking a step back and swaying on her hips. 'That *is* an exciting thought.'
'Won't that make the gods angry?' Lily spoke up.
'The gods are not real' Cam told her shortly. 'They are merely something created by men, an idea, and nothing more.'
There was a pause.
'Children listen to your uncle' Miranda said. 'I'm sure he's right. After all they say…gods only help those who will help themselves. Then what good are they I ask?'
She took another deep swig from the bottle. Luke glanced over at her, wearing an expression of slight concern as he saw how much she had been drinking, but he said nothing.
'Cam' Wonderland spoke to him. 'Meet me in the tower later tonight, when it is dark. Your favourite tower. You know the one.'
'Yeah' Cam said. 'See you there.'

It was maybe an hour or so later, when Cam was walking calmly through the palace corridors, heading towards the tower. The others were gone now, either to bed or to tend to their own business, and Cam was alone.
He had already been to the tower recently once before, to tell his story to his mother, brother and Valery, telling them where he had gone and what had happened to him. Going there for a second time, it still felt strange to him, and he was gripped by a strong sense of nostalgia, and sadness.
He pushed these feelings aside, continuing on.
He ascended the spiral staircase, heading higher up the tower until he reached the door at the very top. When he stepped through this door, he found Wonderland there waiting for him.
'Cam' the fairy said to him gleefully, rising from where she had been sitting on the stone wall. 'There you are.'
'I said I'd be here, didn't I?'
Wonderland smiled at him, flashing her perfect smile, before turning away and indicating a figure which stood behind her now. Cam had not noticed this second figure until that point.
'Cam' Wonderland began, bringing the figure closer, grasping the person's arm lightly. 'This is Clara. She is the first member of the new council I will help you form.'
Cam saw the figure visibly shrink before him, eyes wide and scared of his appearance. He was terrifying to her.
Cam's body convulsed suddenly, and he put his hand to the left side of his head, over his left ear.
The sensation in his body passed again, and he relaxed.
Cam lowered his hand, staring back at the new figure, blinking slowly.
'This' he began slowly, 'is the first person you have chosen?'
'You don't like her?'
'Why a woman?' Cam asked. 'The council has never had a woman on it before.'
'What better person to choose then' Wonderland told him excitedly, placing her hands together before her. 'You want your new council to be different from the old one. You want variety, differences to be discussed from all angles, not just the same type of people, rich old men who care only for benefiting themselves. You want people who live different lives, follow different beliefs. What better way to create a new world than listening to the people on the bottom of society?' She grinned widely, almost a predatory smile. 'I believe' she said speaking slowly, 'that you should create a world, not knowing who you will be within it. What fairer system is that?'
Cam bowed his head, considering her words.
'The next person I would like to join the council' Wonderland continued, 'is a child younger than ten.'
'A child?'
'And then an old man' Wonderland went on. 'Someone rich, someone poor, a mother, a gypsy…' she paused in thought. 'As many different people as I can gather together. I will create a new society.'
'You are serious about helping me?' Cam said to her.

‘Absolutely’ Wonderland replied seriously. ‘Clara wants to help make the world right again. She has suffered because of….’ She broke off then, considering Cam and watching him closely. ‘Her entire family were killed because of the council’ Wonderland finished. ‘She barely escaped with her life. It is only her left now, even her children have been killed.’
‘So, you know what suffering is?’ Cam spoke, addressing this new figure at last.
‘Yes’ Clara nodded, her voice was quiet and sad. ‘Wonderland has explained everything to me in great detail. We’ve been here for hours just talking. I know all about your journey to the other worlds, what you’ve learned, and what you have become.’
‘And are you afraid of me?’
Clara bowed her head.
‘I have never seen anything like you before’ she mumbled to the ground as she wove her fingers together before her. ‘I…I saw what you did in the streets. You flew like a god…it was….it was…. astounding.’
‘And is that how you view me as?’ Cam asked the woman. ‘A god?’
The woman Clara hunched her shoulders uncertainly, and as Cam reached his consciousness out and towards her, he saw mingled with the fear and uncertainty, admiration.
He smirked at this.
‘I wish I could see things from your point of view’ Cam said to her, ‘without a clouded mind.’
‘I’m afraid my mind is not clear, I am…I suffer nightmares from what I have seen. I cannot get away from these torturous thoughts that plague me every night and waking moment.’
‘I know how that feels’ Cam mumbled in reply.
‘This new council will be a wonderful project for me’ Wonderland gleamed. ‘I will help you to make things right.’
‘I ask again’ Cam said to Wonderland, ‘why do you want to help me?’
‘I feel this strange sort of attachment to you’ Wonderland replied, giving the same answer to him as she did before. ‘I can’t really explain it.’
‘Is there anything else?’ Cam said to her. ‘I wish to be alone.’
‘No’ Wonderland shook her head. ‘There is nothing else but…’
‘Yes?’ Cam prompted.
‘Clara will be staying here at the palace. This is her home now. There will be many people staying at the palace, she is the first.’
‘The new council members’ Cam mumbled.
‘Indeed’ Wonderland replied, giving a low nod, eyes shining brightly.
‘And are you sure you want this,’ Cam asked Clara, ‘to have such responsibility?’
‘I have nothing else to live for’ Clara answered sadly. ‘My children are dead, my parents….my entire family. I want to do what little I can to make things right, to right the wrongs of this world, if it isn’t already too late.’
‘We shall see.’
‘Goodbye then Cam’ Wonderland said to him. ‘I’m sure we will see each other again soon, tomorrow morning perhaps.’
‘Perhaps’ Cam replied, turning away and heading back down the spiral stairs of the tower.

He walked through the silent palace, it was dark now, the corridors lit only by a few torches here and there. It still felt so strange for Cam to be home again, given how long he had been away and how much he and everything around him had changed.
He paused after a time, stopping in the middle of the corridor. Cam realised suddenly how few guards were in the palace now. Not like when he was a child, when even at night armoured figures could be seen, standing like statues in the shadows, utterly still but very much alive.
Cam let out a heavy sigh, blinking slowly.
As he stood there, he remembered his younger self, running up and down the corridors playing with his brother.
And he remembered Brioke.
'I almost wish you were still alive' Cam said to the empty air around him, 'just so you could see me now…and see what I've become.'
He continued to walk through the palace, moving slowing up and down the many stairs, until his feet took him to one of the many libraries within the palace.
He stepped inside, closing the door after him and craning his head back.
The room was large, filled with thousands of books and with a vast amount of open space, balconies and stairs and a great table in the centre.
Cam stared at the table, glancing to the side towards the floor, then towards the window ledge.
He remembered sitting here in these various places, for hours on end, so engrossed in the books he had read. Cam thought as he gazed about him in the dark, that he had probably read nearly every single book in this library, and all the other libraries in this palace, all at least once.
Cam stepped forwards, lighting the room around him with his magic, the fires within the lanterns hanging about the room lit suddenly, burning brightly.
Cam sat on the steps leading up to the balcony above.
He tilted his head to the side, towards the bookshelf nearest him, and used his magic to pull a book very carefully from the shelf, carrying it through the air towards him.
He raised his hands, taking it carefully and placing the book on his lap.
He opened it, staring down at the pages for several moments, feeling sadness within him, as he realised, he was still unable to read the pages, his eyes were so poor, even more so at night and in dark and dim places.
Dammit my new eye…. why doesn't it work?
Cam let out a weary sigh, a feeling of great sadness and misery dampening his heart.
'Try this' said a voice, and Cam glanced up in surprise then, seeing the plague-masked figure standing over him, having materialized from thin air.
Cam looked at the book the figure held out for him, before taking it in his hands.
It was a special print, the words much larger to make it easier to read, and Cam saw this well enough.
'Thank you, Vergil,' Cam smiled up at the figure genuinely.
The figure only bowed silently, before gliding away and vanishing.
Cam began to read, and though he thought he was alone, so engrossed in this new story he had never read before, there was in fact another figure watching over him.

Wonderland sat on the balcony above, legs dangling over the drop below. She smiled warmly, batting her green wings slowly, and feeling warmth in her heart.
Cam could not hear her, only the constant ringing in his ears, and he was so enveloped in the story that he read, he did not sense her with his magic either.
'Cam' she whispered, low enough so that only she could hear. 'I am so happy.'
Cam read the entire book, it took him a little longer than it would have done, as he read it slowly, but he enjoyed every moment of it. And in the moment he closed the book, he felt happier than he had in a long time, enlightened, though his eyes and mind were hurting him now.
He raised his head, scratching at his left ear, his body twitching uncontrollably for several seconds before easing off.
The door to the library opened suddenly, and Cam saw two small figures running in.
Above on the balcony, remaining unseen, Wonderland watched joyfully.
Roy and Lily ran to Cam.
'What are you doing awake?' Cam mumbled to them.
'We wanted to see you' Lily giggled.
Cam turned his head towards her, blinking slowly.
'Do your parents know you both are out of bed?'
'No' Roy answered shortly. 'We always run away and they don't know.'
Cam shook his head slowly.
'That's dangerous.'
'No it isn't' Roy answered, as Lily on Cam's other side began to touch his metallic arm, lifting it and examining is closely. Cam allowed this. 'It's no more dangerous than what you did as a child' Roy finished. 'The angel told us everything.'
'Angel?' And then it clicked. 'Oh. You mean the fairy.'
'She's so beautiful' Lily gleamed, sighing and feeling a little jealous.
She took a seat on the step beside Cam, leaning into him.
Cam looked down at her. He reached his consciousness out towards her, sensing her emotions. There was no fear within her at all, but Cam sensed something strange inside. It was love.
She loved him.
Both children were very different to what Kanae had been, he had been far more fearful of Cam. But even upon first sight of him, his brother's children did not fear him. Not in the slightest.
Cam looked ahead again.
'Would you like me to read to you?' Roy asked Cam.
Cam blinked in surprise.
'Um. Yes', he finished. 'I would love that…. very much.'
'The angel told us you love to read' Roy said to him, sitting on his other side. 'She told us you could not see properly, so you need help.'
Cam felt something then, glancing up towards the balcony above, he sensed Wonderland sitting above him at that moment. She had reached her magic out to him, touching him, wanting to tell him that she was there, watching over the children, and watching over Cam.

‘It’s true’ Cam told the children looking down again. ‘You are both far safer than I or your father ever was as a child.’
‘We know’ Lily spoke to him, as Roy went over to one of the shelves to get a book. ‘The angel told us.’
‘She hasn’t told you everything’ Cam mumbled.
‘Yes, she has’ Lily replied. ‘She has. We know everything, from Auntie being killed, to you being raped by Brioke, to how you lost your arms, to how you accidently killed your son.’
Cam did not react to this, save for the slightest twitch in his face as he stared unblinking down at Lily, eyes out of focus.
‘And’ Cam began after a time, ‘you are still not afraid of me?’
‘No’ Lily answered quietly. ‘Not even a little bit.’
Cam bowed his head then, feeling a strange surge of love towards the girl. He raised his arm, placing it around her shoulders and grasping her lightly. Lily leant into him, resting her head against his body.
Roy returned carrying a book.
‘How about this one?’ he said holding it out. ‘It’s a story called ‘BlackHeart-Shade.’
‘Anything’ Cam said in response. ‘I don’t mind.’
Roy sat on his other side, opening the book to the first page and beginning to read, confidently, and clearly. Cam was surprised how good he was at reading, and how he didn’t hesitate to read even the more difficult words.
You’ve been taught well Cam thought with pride, listening to the boy read. *I am so happy.*
Cam let out a slow sigh, closing his eyes, allowing his body to relax, as Roy continued reading them the story, all the while, thinking about the words Wonderland had spoken to him.
You need a new council. Your very own council, made up of people you trust.

The next day Cam wandered the streets alone, he thought he was completely alone at first, but then he felt a presence following him. It was Wonderland.
Cam tilted his head back, narrowing his eyes, his body twitching then.
He began to scratch the left side of his head hard, causing his scalp to bleed. He looked ahead again, as Wonderland flew gracefully through the air, landing lightly beside him and falling in step with him.
‘Where are you going?’ she asked him merrily.
‘I’m taking a walk.’
‘Oh yes, I remember’ Wonderland gleamed, placing her hands together before her. ‘You enjoy taking walks. Why is that?’
‘Why?’ Cam sighed wearily, as if were a great effort to explain. ‘I like to walk’ he said. ‘I....it clears my mind.’
‘You walked often out into the wilderness’ Wonderland said to him. ‘Back in the home you used to live, the one that belonged to Lucy, and the one before that.’

‘Yes’ Cam mumbled as he continued to march through the streets. ‘I enjoy it. It makes me happy.’
‘You like to walk’ Wonderland said to him. ‘I love to fly.’
‘That….’ Cam sighed. ‘I just like to walk.’
‘So where is Lucy?’
‘She’s back at the palace.’
‘She’s sad you know?’ Wonderland said to him.
‘I know’ Cam mumbled. ‘Yes’ he said. ‘I know.’
‘She still loves you’ Wonderland told him. ‘But I’m sure you know that. You can feel her love, can’t you? I know how your magic works, you can feel people’s emotions around you, if their feelings are strong…you can feel them. Can’t you.’
It wasn’t phrased as a question. Wonderland knew this already for certain.
‘People…’ she began, ‘you can feel their thoughts.’ She paused. ‘You…you can’t feel everything. Only what is strong.’ She paused again, continuing to walk alongside Cam as he marched onwards, never slowing his pace. ‘You can feel how much Lucy loves you’ Wonderland went on, ‘but you don’t know what do to. Isn’t that right?’
‘Yes’ Cam answered reluctantly. ‘I don’t know what to do with her. I…...am breaking her heart. I know this but….’ He broke off, shaking his head. ‘Everything has become so messed up. Everything has become so dam complicated. I shouldn’t have lived this long.’
‘I understand’ Wonderland said. ‘You have a duty to do. There is so much suffering that will….’ She sighed with a smile. ‘It’s a shame Lucy has to be here to see all of this. But as she stayed with William, even though he beat her, she will stay with you too. She loves you. Despite what you’ve done, despite what you are.’
‘I know’ Cam replied. He slowed to a stop, staring with eyes unblinking at the ground before him.
‘I…I wish she would leave me….so she does not have to suffer. But I cannot make her. I know she loves me and I don’t know what to do…’
‘Don’t worry about it’ Wonderland said to him. ‘She will do what she will do. It is her choice to stay. What you have to do now…. what you have to focus your mind on… is to form a new council.’ She kicked her feet playfully, batting her wings happily before straightening again. ‘And when you have your capital under order’ Wonderland continued, ‘then you can extend your reach. You will take over the rest of this world. You will be a god that people will adore and worship, a god that protects the weak and punishes the wicked. There will be no mercy.’
‘Yes’ Cam mumbled. ‘That is what I want to be…’
Wonderland grinned widely at him, giving him a wolfish smile as she reached out to him, placing a hand upon his shoulder and squeezing tightly, feeling the metallic surface beneath his clothing.
‘There are still a lot of people who suffer on these streets, homeless and the victims. Do you see that child over there?’ Wonderland asked, turning and glancing away then.
‘No’ Cam replied. ‘You know I cannot see.’
‘He is just a boy’ Wonderland spoke in a distant voice. ‘He must be barely thirteen.’
‘What about him?’
‘I’ve seen him before’ Wonderland mentioned. ‘He is living in the streets, and he is starving and afraid. Perhaps he should live in the palace instead.’

‘You want to make a child a member of the council, don’t you?’
‘Yes’ Wonderland breathed. ‘He’s perfect.’
Cam remained where he stood as Wonderland left his side, her large wings splayed outwards as the people moving in the streets around stared in silent wonder. Wonderland dressed brightly, as she did when she was not hiding in her black robes and mask. She approached the boy, and Cam struggled to hear what she was saying.
‘Today is your lucky day’ Wonderland grinned down at the boy, speaking loudly.
Cam felt the boys initial fear begin to slowly to ebb away, until he felt nothing.
‘What is your name?’ Wonderland asked the boy.
The boy replied with ‘Eustace.’
‘Well Eustace, today just got better for you. Oh, what’s that?’ Wonderland said. ‘You have a sick grandfather. That’s great, he can come too. Would you both like to live at the palace?’
The boy Eustace stared nervously up at Wonderland, eyes wide.
‘Live at the palace?’ he mumbled.
‘Yes’ Wonderland replied.
‘That would be a dream come true’ the boy breathed in awe and disbelief at the words he had heard from the fairy. ‘Only in my stories have a heard of such a thing happening to ordinary folk.’
‘This is no trick’ Wonderland said to him. ‘I assure you. I want you to help us run this country. You will have as much power as a member of the old council used to have. But this council will be a kinder and fairer one.’ Her eyes shone brightly as she leant forwards, waiting for the boy’s response. ‘What do you say?’

Wonderland returned to the palace, with the boy and his sick grandfather who was carried on a stretcher.
‘You are going to be perfect’ Wonderland said to the sick man.
‘I don’t understand’ the old man mumbled. ‘Why are you helping us?’
‘We are creating a better world’ Wonderland told him excitedly, ‘and you are going to help us. You will receive the best care available. Don’t you worry. You will have a wonderful bed to sleep on and good food. The both of you will’ she said turning to the boy Eustace. ‘Both of you will be very well cared for, until the day you die’ she said raising an eyebrow, casting a glance over at the old man as he lay on the stretcher.
She hung back as the two were led away by servants. The boy Eustace followed closely by his grandfather who was carried on a stretcher.
‘They will be given rooms in which to stay’ Wonderland said, watching them go. ‘And their lives will be comfortable from here onwards.’ She turned back to Cam who stood one step behind her. ‘Especially for the boy, things will be wonderful. He has been given a great opportunity, a new start. He will have a good life for sure. Isn’t that brilliant?’ she beamed.
‘Sure’ Cam replied flatly.
‘I will be absent for a few days after this’ she told Cam. ‘I am going to find a gypsy.’
‘Good’ Cam mumbled to her. ‘You do that.’
Wonderland vanished from his sight then. Disappearing into thin air right before his eyes.

Cam bowed his head, turning back to Lucy who stood behind him.
'Are you alright?' he asked her.
'I'm fine.'
'That dress looks really nice on you' he spoke quietly.
'Thanks' she answered weakly. 'I'm glad.'
There was a moments silence that passed between them.
'I…I don't mean to neglect you' Cam said to her awkwardly. 'I…I don't want you to suffer.'
Lucy smiled. 'I know.'
'Can we….um…...' Cam twitched suddenly, scratching the left side of his head. 'Do you think that we could maybe have a meal together?'
'What do you mean?'
'I um….'
'Are you nervous?' Lucy asked him then.
'Ah' Cam breathed. 'You are sweet. Um…yeah' he swallowed anxiously before continuing. 'We eat a lot with the others' he said to Lucy. 'Do you think that this time we could eat alone together? Just the two of us?'
Lucy watched him closely.
'That would be wonderful' she said, speaking with sincerity.
'You really think so?'
Lucy nodded at him.
'You seem so different now' she told him, 'so innocent, like your old self.'
'That old self is gone' Cam answered stoically.
Lucy reached a hand out to him, and Cam took her hand, grasping it lightly in his own.
'I would love to eat with you on the balcony' Cam said to her. 'The sun will be setting soon, and the sky will be beautiful.'

A short while later, and Cam and Lucy sat alone at a white table, upon matching seats that had thick and comfortable cushions. They were served by a single female servant who brought them their food and everything else they needed. Though Cam could not help but sense great amusement within the servant when she came closer, and as he looked towards the ground, he saw the unmistakable tip of a plague mask, hiding just out of sight behind a potted plant. Cam's sight was poor, but he could see this much at least, and he could not stop from rolling his eyes in exasperation.
'Are you alright Cam?' Lucy asked.
'I'm fine.'
They ate in silence for a short time.
Cam looked across the table at Lucy as they ate. Their meal, duck with orange, was delicious.
Lucy glanced up at Cam, noticing him watching her.
'What?' she mumbled shyly, dabbing at her lips with a napkin. 'Don't watch me when I eat' she said to him, 'you'll make me self-conscious.'
'You're just so beautiful' he said to her. 'I wish we could just…go away together. All I really want is to be with you. I…I love you. I don't know when the last time I told you that was. I thought I should tell you again. That's all.'
Cam quickly bowed his head, returning his attention to his food now with great interest.

‘I know’ Lucy said to him. ‘I’m really enjoying myself.’
Cam glanced up with surprise.
‘You are?’
‘This palace is really beautiful’ Lucy said, turning away and looking to all that was around her, the balcony, the great building towering over them, the palace ground below. ‘I have never been in this palace before, and it’s so strange for me to be here. It’s so strange where life takes you. I think the palace is really breath-taking.’
‘I never thought so’ Cam told her glumly. ‘I always hated it here.’
Lucy paused for a moment, looking back to him as she watched him closely.
‘Could you tell me a story?’ Lucy asked suddenly. ‘You have read so many stories.’
‘In my lifetime’ Cam said to her, ‘I must have read easily thousands of stories.’
‘What is your favourite?’
‘I couldn’t possibly say’ Cam replied. ‘There are just so many.’
Lucy stared at him for a while, before looking away again, tilting her head towards eth sky. The stars were beginning to shine in the darkening blanket above, twinkling like little jewels in the cosmos. The moon could be seen in the sky overhead, its sibling the sun was just sinking below the horizon.
‘It’s starting to get cold’ Lucy breathed.
Cam extended his magic outwards.
Lucy turned to him with a smile.
‘It just got warm’ she grinned. ‘Did you just do that?’
‘Of course.’
Lucy looked away again.
‘Go on then’ she prompted. ‘Tell me a story.’
Cam blinked slowly.
‘There was a creature, a chimera, that lived a very long time ago. A creature made out of many others. He was a creature with no name, and belonged to an alchemist, the one that created him. And on the day he was created, he escaped…’

They sat on the balcony for many hours, long after it had become dark. But it was not cold. Cam heated the air around them, and Lucy sat comfortably. She was warm and she was happy, Cam could feel her emotions, the glow within her heart. And as it began to get darker, Cam used his magic the light the balcony so that they could still see each other, and he continued to tell her the story he recited from memory.
When she began to get tired, Cam walked with her back inside, holding her hand in his.
She lay in bed, Cam sitting on the edge and caressing her cheek tenderly, his metallic hand felt cold.
‘You’re not coming to bed?’ she asked him.
‘No’ Cam told her. ‘I am not tired.’
‘You don’t sleep much lately.’
‘I can’t sleep. My mind is….. I have so much to think about, I cannot relax.’
Lucy snuggled into the sheets then, hugging them to her.
‘I’ll see you in the morning’ Cam said to her, rising from the bed and moving away.

‘Cam wait’ Lucy whispered.
He paused, glancing back to her.
‘Can you kiss me?’
Cam lingered there for a moment, before turning back.
He leant over her as she craned her head back, feeling his lips upon hers as they kissed briefly.
‘Sleep’ Cam whispered to her, straightening then and moving away. ‘Go to sleep.’

He left her there, walking slowly through the dark and cold corridors of the palace, pausing after a time and raising his head as he sensed something.
A figure stepped before him.
‘Wonderland’ Cam mumbled.
‘I have found what I was looking for’ Wonderland gleamed excitedly at him, turning to look to her side then.
The corridors lit up then in a green glow, emanating from Wonderland’s fairy-wings. Cam saw then by her side, a gypsy, easily distinguished by her dark skin, painted eyes and the bright clothes she wore.
‘Her name is Amethyst’ Wonderland voiced. ‘She would be pleased to serve on the council. I have told her everything, including the part of your life where you once lived as a gypsy. She was very interested in that part of your tale. A king that lived as a gypsy.’ Wonderland glanced back at Cam with a teasing look in her eyes, body shivering with excitement. ‘She is a very bold spirit’ Wonderland told Cam. ‘She is perfect.’
And as Cam reached his consciousness out towards this new figure, he found that what Wonderland said was true. The gypsy was not afraid at all, but he felt something there inside her along with the excitement and slight nerves, it was admiration.
Cam drew his magic back, bowing his head.
‘If what the fairy has told me is true’ the gypsy Amethyst spoke up, addressing Cam, ‘then you are an incredible human being.’
‘It’s true’ Cam mumbled. ‘Its all true. Even the worst parts.’
‘Can you still play the flute like Durril taught you?’ the gypsy asked.
‘No. I don’t think so. That was a long time ago.’
‘Oh’ Amethyst sighed. ‘That’s a shame.’
‘So, you want to serve on the council’ Cam said to her.
‘I do’ Amethyst spoke confidently. ‘I have been forced to hide for the longest time. But I feel confidence once again to paint my eyes and wear the clothes I used to, the ones that are really me.’
‘I understand’ Cam mumbled.
‘I am working hard’ Wonderland said to him. ‘It will be only a few more days now, and I will have a council, a new council fit to rule this kingdom as you want. I have been searching far and wide without rest.’
‘Thank you’ Cam said to her.

‘Amethyst will be living at the palace from now on’ Wonderland replied, placing a hand on her shoulder and glancing towards her fondly. ‘As will the rest of the council members when I find them.’
‘Yes, I know.’
‘It will be just a few more days’ Wonderland said to him. ‘I almost have all the pieces. Just give me time. I will show you when I am done.’
Cam gave her a slow nod, dipping his head.
‘I know you will.’

It was just a few days later, as Wonderland had promised, that she presented to him most of the new council.
‘Here’ Wonderland said turning on the spot, her arms extended. ‘Here is your new council.’
Cam raised his head slightly, blinking slowly.
‘I see a lot of people here’ he mumbled. ‘How many are there?’
‘Seventy-nine’ Wonderland replied proudly. ‘I just need a few more.’
Cam led out a heavy sigh, hand going to his forehead as he began to laugh quietly to himself.
He straightened then, seeing a few figures beside him whom he recognised.
There was Clara, the first member of the new council who had been found. And before her. The young boy Eustace, and his grandfather, sitting in a chair beside him, weak and frail but still alive. And beside him, was the gypsy Amethyst.
‘There are so many’ Cam uttered.
‘This is just the beginning’ Wonderland said to him gleefully. ‘The best is still to come.’

Many nights later, there was a great fire.
Wonderland had gathered the last of the people she deemed as ‘unworthy’ to live in the new world she was helping Cam to create. And she burned them all alive.
Cam saw the fires from within the palace, seeing the garden ablaze. There was a huge pyre on the palace grounds, and the screams rang through the night, tens of them in wailing agony as they died.
Cam descended through the palace, stepping out into the night, feeling none of the cold air around him.
Wonderland was jumping up and down before the dying men with joy and excitement, Cam saw her silhouette, her glassy wings reflecting the light from the fires.
She turned as Cam approached her.
‘This is the last of them’ Wonderland said to Cam as he came closer. ‘The capital city is now purged’ she said, turning with glee in her eyes back towards the colossal fire. ‘First the capital’ she breathed, ‘and then *the rest of the world*.’

Cam stared at her, seeing Wonderland's smile.
He looked away again, back towards the fire, blinking slowly. The light shining in his milky eye.

A few days later, and Wonderland had completed her task. She had at last found all the members of the new council she had been working so hard to create.
'They are here at last' Wonderland said to Cam, as they walked side by side down the palace corridor. 'I have finally completed my task, though it was not easy.'
Cam walked swiftly forwards, keeping pace with Wonderland as she began to skip beside him, swinging her arms merrily.
'Oh Cam!' she gleamed in pure joy, 'why do I feel so happy when I am around you?'
'I don't know but you keep saying this' Cam replied quickly. 'It's getting boring.'
'I just wish I could find the answer to this mystery' Wonderland gleamed. 'Me, a fairy, feeling such a strong connection with you, a king and lord, a WeatherMaker.'
Wonderland took Cam by the hands now, spinning with him as she held onto him firmly.
'Oh Cam, isn't this all so wonderful?'
She let go of him then, patting down her multicoloured dress briefly, before turning away, lifting her arms dramatically.
'I have gathered them together' Wonderland continued, as Cam standing now, stared at Wonderland with a level expression. 'They are waiting for us, the members of the council, the new council, completed, *our* council that I have created…. for you.'
She approached Cam, pressing her hand upon his chest now.
'I did this for you Cam' Wonderland said to him, sending warmth through her hand to Cam. 'I did this for you.'
As Wonderland touched Cam at the chest, Cam felt faint magic passing through her hand and into his body. He felt his body relax then, he felt a little calmer.
'Come with me' Wonderland told him, speaking quietly now. 'They are just in the next room.'
Cam glanced away from her, blinking slowly.
He saw the great double doors of the hall before him, taking a deep breath.
'Ok' Cam breathed. 'I'm ready.'
Wonderland opened the double doors together, the great doors creaking as they swung open, revealing the figures waiting inside.
Wonderland stepped forwards, Cam marching after her into the hall.
Cam narrowed his eyes, seeing the blurred faces of the many before him, the new members of the council. Cam's council. His right hand.
'How many are there?' Cam asked Wonderland.
'One hundred and fifty' Wonderland said proudly. 'I am so happy.'
'Who is this?' Cam said, turning to one of the men nearby, a man far older than the others within the hall. He lay on a bed. He was sick. He was dying.
'That is the grandfather of Eustace, the young boy' Wonderland said to Cam, approaching the man. 'How do you feel?' she asked him.
The old man muttered a response, but Cam could not hear it. There was only ringing in his ears.

‘He does not have long yet to live’ Wonderland told Cam, turning back to him.
‘And where is the boy?’ Cam asked.
‘Right here’ Wonderland replied, putting her hand on the boy’s shoulder.
He stood right next to her.
‘Oh. I did not see.’
‘Both are vital’ Wonderland spoke, looking back at them. ‘The grandfather and child. We need all kinds of people. Those that are on deaths doorway have a new perspective on life and existence, you should know that’ she said winking back at Cam.
Cam bowed his head.
‘Thank you Wonderland’ he said to her. ‘I am grateful. You have done so much for me, so thank you, from the bottom of my heart.’ He raised his head to her, looking at her straight in the eye now. ‘I couldn’t do this without you.’

A few days later, Cam was walking alone through the town. At least he thought he was alone.
‘Where are you going?’
‘Please leave me be Wonderland.’
‘You’re going to meet the family, aren’t you?’ Wonderland said. ‘The family of the council member that you burned alive.’
‘Yes’ Cam replied sombrely. ‘I promised I would do it. I owe it to him.’
‘That is very noble of you’ Wonderland smiled, keeping in step with him. ‘And I thought for a time that you had forgotten.’
‘Noble’ Cam mumbled. ‘I am a murderer. What could be called noble about me?’
‘Good luck Cam’ Wonderland called after him, slowing to a stop and watching him go. ‘I know this is not easy for you.’
She watched as Cam continued to walk by himself down the silent street, heading towards the home, to fulfil his promise.
‘Tell my daughter to continue with her music lessons. Tell my son to not let others bring him down, and tell my wife I’m sorry.’
‘I will fulfil my promise’ Cam said quietly to himself, ‘I will fulfil my promise, I must do what is right.’ This was his mantra.

Vergil stood on the balcony of a tower nearby, overlooking the buildings around. He saw Cam walking through the city, heading towards one of the homes.
Vergil gave a slow sigh, stepping back and tilting his head back as he stared up at the sky.
‘It’s so bright today’ he mumbled to himself, hand going to his head. ‘It’s too warm.’ He glanced down again, seeing Cam enter one of the homes.
‘I hope it goes well for you’ Vergil spoke to the air, ‘I know it’s not easy.’

Cam spent that evening alone. He did not read, but instead just wandered the wilderness listlessly. The light was failing, and Cam struggled to see. But that did not matter to him.
Out here he felt free, even a little happy. Most of the time these days, he felt numb, like he was living outside himself, like his body was not his anymore. He barely felt like he was even alive most of the time. Everything felt cold to him. When people touched him, he did not feel their warmth. Not from anyone, save from his brother.
Cam stopped walking suddenly, looking about him.
It was dark.
'I want to feel my old self again' he mumbled. 'I hate what I have become.'
Cam returned to the palace only when it was pitch black, using magic from his own body to light the way.
He entered the palace through one of the smaller doors, stepping into the still room.
Everything was utterly silent, and Cam could hear nothing, save for the ringing in his ears.
The room he stood in was a small one, completely empty. Nothing but a dark corridor.
It was very cold here, and as Cam let out a slow breath, there was a fog before his mouth.
The palace was a very large place, a great space, empty within for the most part. There were many places within where the howling wind could be heard. Some of the rooms and corridors were small, but these were few.
He made his way forwards, stepping out of the tiny corridor and into a larger hall, through the many doors of the palace, up the many stairs.
'Cam…'
He stopped at the sound of his name, though he barely heard it.
Out of the shadows, stepped Wonderland.
'I need you for a moment' she spoke in a quiet voice.
'What for?'
'The old man is dying' Wonderland spoke meekly. 'The member of the council. He wants to speak to you one last.'

Cam approached his bed.
'Is that you?' the old man said. 'Is that the king?'
Wonderland circled around the bed, gliding to the other side.
'He is here' Wonderland said to the old man. 'The king is here to see you.'
'Your majesty' the old man uttered.
'I am here' Cam spoke.
The old man let out a sigh, leaning back in his bed. He was incredibly weak and pale, his hands shaking slightly.
'I'm glad I got this chance to speak to you.'
'What is on your mind?'
'I wanted to speak to you' the old man breathed, 'just one last time.'
'I am listening' Cam bowed his head.
The man smiled.

‘I have been given this opportunity’ the old man said, ‘but I am unable to….’ He sighed then, closing his eyes. ‘Please’ the old man said opening them again, ‘help to make this world a better place again, for my children, and my grandchildren.’
‘This is swear’ Cam spoke firmly. ‘Even if it means my own death’ he said, ‘I will do everything in my power to fix this world.’
The old man smiled again.
‘My family’ he whispered. ‘They are gypsies. They’ve been hunted for years by the old council. Many of them have died, most of them but…. I survived.’
Cam listened silently to the man’s words.
‘I have lost so many of my family’ the old man said. ‘But I have not given up hope.’
Cam did not know if there was more that the man wanted to say, for at that moment, he died.

Cam walked through the palace, heading to the higher floors. He found Lucy waiting for him.
‘Hey Cam’ she said to him. ‘There you are.’
‘Lucy. What are you doing?’
Lucy who had been leaning forwards upon the balcony overhead straightened up then, walking down the stairs towards him.
‘You look so beautiful’ he mumbled to her as she came closer.
‘I thought you couldn’t see’ she said to him as she slowed to a stop before him, standing upon the stairs a step above him.
‘I can see a little’ he replied. ‘That dress is beautiful’ he told her, reaching out to touch her skin, his metallic fingers cold against her flesh. ‘I like the way it runs across your shoulders.’
Lucy looked down at herself shyly, before glancing up again.
‘I’ve never dressed so beautifully before.’
‘You know I’ve always loved your hair’ Cam mumbled, hardly hearing the words she had spoken. ‘I always thought it was so beautiful…. red like the setting sun.’
Lucy smiled.
‘Where did you go?’ she asked him.
‘I went into the streets to um…. if you must know’ he said to her, ‘one of the men I burned alive….one of the members of the old council… asked me to pass a message onto his family. And that is what I did.’
‘I see.’
Lucy glanced to her feet then, before looking back up at Cam.
‘Wonderland says she wants to show us something incredible. She insisted upon this. She used the word ‘incredible’ several times.’
‘I see.’
‘She’s right up there’ Lucy said. ‘She’s been waiting for you as I have.’
Cam craned his head back, narrowing his eyes as he tries to see the fairy clearly.
Wonderland was sitting upon the chandelier, swinging gently back and forth on its great chain.
‘Hello again Cam’ she called down to him, speaking clearly. ‘Did you enjoy your visit to that dead man’s home and family?’

‘You know I didn’t’ he replied sourly, glaring up at her. ‘Why are you here again? I thought you would leave me alone now. What else do you want?’
Wonderland straightened up then, hanging off the chain, before letting go. She levitated in the air for a moment, before descending slowly, her vivid clothes lifting around her.
She touched the ground, and held her hands together, smiling at him widely.
‘There is something I want to show you’ she said to them both. ‘Lucy has not seen it yet’ she nodded towards her, speaking to Cam now, ‘but…. I used a lot of magic. I changed a part of the palace’s structure and created a sort of secret garden.’
‘You changed the palace?’
‘Yes’ Wonderland said to him. ‘You are the only person who can enter the secret garden’ she said to Cam. ‘You, Lucy and your niece and nephew. The doorway is sealed by magic and opens only when it feels your pulse. It detects the blood within your body, the heart pumping it through your veins. Let me show you.’
She led them through the palace, heading to the higher levels, until they came to a large door.
‘You’ve changed a lot’ Cam noted, seeing the great doorway before him.
‘Wait till you see inside’ Wonderland gleamed excitedly. ‘So much of this is vastly different to what you knew before.’
She put reached out with a single hand and pushed the door. The runes in the door itself, a set of swirling patterns, began to glow blue, and the door opened at her lightest touch, despite how heavy they looked. They opened on their own.
‘I of course can enter this place’ Wonderland told them both, ‘and the rest of the eight.’
Wonderland raised her chin, walking proudly forwards, Cam and Lucy followed after.
It was as if they had stepped into another world, as if it were a portal to a new place entirely, but as Cam looked around, he began to recognise sections of the palace itself around them, as he had spent so many years a prisoner here.
The whole area had been opened up, and the sky was clearly visible above them. There were areas of shelter still, balconies and overhanging sections of stone. It was a beautiful place, the garden was green., ivy growing thickly around the columns, thick grass at their feet, vivid blue flowers that were trumpet shaped, with purple stems, the type of flowers never before seen in this world.
There was even a small waterfall, falling gently into a pool below. There were lilies floating on the surface of the water, and within bright orange fish swimming peacefully.
‘These fish are dead’ Wonderland said to them, walking over towards the pool and leaning over it. ‘They are not real, just an illusion….’
She straightened up again, turning back to face the others.
Cam remained passive. Lucy had her hands over her mouth in awe. She was lost for words at all she saw around them.
Wonderland giggled, amused by her reaction.
‘You think this is impressive? Let me show you something else.’
She turned around to face the other way, and as if controlled by her wishes, a creature stepped forwards and into sight, stepping out from around the corner.
Lucy gasped in shock as the colossus padded ever so slowly forwards, stopping beside Wonderland and standing calmly and still.
Cam blinked slowly, barely showing any reaction. He stared up at it.

‘This is a chimera’ Wonderland explained happily. ‘If you don’t know what that is, it’s a creature made up of many. I find them incredibly fascinating. They are truly incredible beasts, and very rare. Even more so in this world’ Wonderland grinned, ‘because they don’t exist. This is the only one.’
Lucy took her hands away from her mouth, staring in disbelief at the creature.
It was a great beast, with the head of a cat, a great red mane around its neck. The cat’s head was in the centre, and either side, covered in fluffy grey fur, were goat heads. The three heads were calm, reaching towards Wonderland as she touched each of them in turn gently.
The body of the creature was hulking, its great paws were massive, though there were no claws there at all. It had a very short tail, that right before them grew to incredible length, becoming thinner as it did. It curled around Wonderland. At the end of the tail, was a thumb and two fingers, these were able to grip things like a hand, its co-ordination precise, and its grip gentle.
‘This was brought here from another world’ Wonderland was saying. ‘Even there it is a rare creature. It does not occur naturally, but was designed, built in a lab, and has no ferocity within it at all. Despite its appearance, it has no ability to be aggressive, not in any way. It is completely safe, safe with children.’ She smiled then towards Cam and Lucy. ‘Roy and Lily will love this creature. It has no sex.’ She added, pausing briefly then. ‘They could name it. I think they would like that.’
‘What if?’ Lucy asked tentatively, finally finding her voice. ‘What if this creature gets out?’
‘It cannot leave this place’ Wonderland replied calmly. ‘If it were to leave this garden, it would die. Its very life-source is tied to this area.’
Wonderland ran her hand slowly down one of the goat heads, watching Lucy closely.
‘Would you like to touch it?
Lucy hesitated, glancing towards Cam cautiously.
Cam watched Lucy closely, but he didn’t move and he did not speak.
Lucy glanced back at the creature, that stood there calmly beside the fairy.
‘Are you sure it’s safe?’ Lucy asked.
‘Yes’ Wonderland replied. ‘This creature is incapable of harming a person, or even protecting a person. This creature is very friendly and docile and does not even know what violence is.’
Lucy stepped forwards uncertainly, reaching out to touch the chimera, her fingers trembling slightly.
‘It’s so soft’ Lucy mumbled as the great cat head bowed to her. ‘Such an incredible creature.’
‘It will keep you company’ Wonderland said, ‘for when Cam leaves this kingdom.’
‘Leaves?’ Lucy echoed.
Wonderland smiled, lifting her head towards Cam.
‘The time is approaching’ Wonderland said. ‘I have formed the new council, and very soon, Cam will leave these shores, and travel to other kingdoms. He will not only make his own kingdom better, but all the kingdoms that surround him. He has immeasurable power, and he will use his abilities to make these lands better. He will change the *entire world*.’
‘Its…’ Lucy mumbled, ‘almost too much to understand.’
Lucy turned back to Cam.
‘I won’t stay behind’ she said to him. ‘When you leave this kingdom, I won’t stay behind.’
‘There is nothing you can do for me’ Cam told her flatly.

‘I want to be by your side.’
Cam bowed his head, brow furrowed, but he said nothing.
‘When are you leaving?’ Wonderland asked Cam, leaning on a hip and folding her arms.
‘Soon’ he replied quietly. ‘Very very soon.’

Many days later, Roy and Lily were exploring the palace at night, watched closely by Wonderland who kept herself hidden. She constantly followed them, when she was not with Cam, she would watch over the children like a guardian, and she would keep them safe.
They ran to the higher levels in the palace, placing their hands together upon the door and pushing it open simultaneously, they entered the secret garden side by side.
The chimera was waiting for them, groaning in pleasure at the sight of them.
The children rushed up to the creature happily, it lay down so they could climb onto its back, holding its tail above them, ready to catch them if they were to fall. Each of the two goat heads turned back to watch them closely, as the great beast walked forwards, carrying the children around the garden slowly.
They loved this creature, they had named it ‘Peter’, and it responded to them.
Wonderland watched mutely from a balcony above them within the garden as the children climbed over the creature, which was lying down upon the ground again now in a different part of the garden.
The creature Peter, moved incredibly cautiously, watching the children closely, always aware of exactly where they were. It was a big creature, and it moved carefully so as not to accidentally hurt them with its weight.
Peter bowed its great cat-head, nuzzling gently into the children. Above them, Wonderland smiled.
Elsewhere, the palace was silent. Cam was not there, and neither was Lucy.
They had left the palace suddenly together and without warning.
When Luke and Valery woke early that next morning, they found their children sound asleep beside the creature Peter. Wonderland had opened the door for them, allowing them to enter.
Valery loved the garden, as did Miranda when she found it at last, but they could not enter without the door being opened for them, as only Wonderland, Cam, Lucy and the children could open the door.
They ate their breakfast in the garden that morning. Luke and Valery and Miranda were seated around the small table placed in the middle of the garden, eating contentedly together.
Miranda glancing up towards the fresh blue sky with a smile upon her face, sighing happily.
Beside them, the children continued to sleep, resting against the great beast, they had not slept much the night before.
‘Fascinating’ Miranda breathed, gazing at the sleeping chimera, before turning away again, taking another sip of tea.
‘Where is Cam?’ Luke asked Wonderland who stood in the shadows of an overhanging tree nearby. ‘And Lucy?’

‘They have both left these lands now’ Wonderland told them. ‘They are far away.’
‘When will they be back?’ Luke asked.
‘I don’t know’ Wonderland shook her head. ‘It may not be for a long while. He has moved his influence outwards.’

Many months later

Cam stood on the balcony of the great palace, looking outwards over the city before him.
The country they had come to was a hot one, and far from their own home. Cam had moved far across the land, word of his deeds had travelled even further, and people feared him. Now he had come to this land, he had taken over the palace with ease, overthrowing the previous king, who had been a cruel and selfish man. His remains had been dumped in the river, along with his brothers and his wife too, who had been the worst of all.
Cam now owned this capital, their army was now his to command, and many of them welcomed him, but as always, there were those that still remained under the old rule. Those that supported the old ruler hated him, and many still thrived. But it was not these men that vexed him now, there were people he wanted to find still, those he had learnt about, but had not found yet. These were not people that opposed him, but people who exploited others, hurt others. Criminal gangs that lived underground. They lived off the suffering of others, they stole, kidnapped, murdered and raped. So far Cam had been unable to find them, until this day.
Wonderland had travelled with him and Lucy of course, and had hardly left their side. It was she who helped him now.
‘I’ve found them’ Wonderland breathed excitedly, materializing by his side.
‘Where?’ Cam asked her quickly.
‘Somewhere you would never expect’ Wonderland told him. ‘I cannot even explain it, it’s such a secluded place, very difficult to find.’
Cam had faced in his short time all sorts of obstacles, not just killing, but finding the people that hid from him, people like this.
‘There is still much to be done’ Cam mumbled to himself.
Behind him, Lucy who had been sitting quietly in the dark part of the room, shielded from the light, turned towards them mutely, her profile cast in shadow.
‘When do we leave?’ Wonderland asked Cam, standing close to him with her hands held before her, her beautiful wings glistening in the bright light. The air was warm around them, humid, as it was so often.
‘Now’ Cam said to Wonderland.
‘Now?’ Wonderland echoed.
‘Why wait? I’ve stayed long enough, and everything here is at long last….’ he sighed, blinking slowly, ‘at long last’ he said, ‘things are how they should be…or they are getting that way…still things to do…so much to do.’ He continued to mumble to himself for a time.

‘I’m proud of you Cam’ Wonderland spoke up, reaching out and grasping his shoulder. ‘Your father would be too.’
She paused then, staring into his eyes, one milky, the other blue.
‘Don’t you feel proud?’ she asked him.
Cam replied.
‘I feel nothing.’

Cam and Wonderland marched through the streets, and as Cam went, he thought of the promise he had made to Lucy just before he left her alone.
‘This is going to be easy’ he had said. *‘I won’t be gone long, just…don’t think about this.’*
‘I know’ Lucy had smiled to him. *‘I will stay here and wait.’*
Cam’s strides were wide as he moved forwards through this city, with its pale stone and winding roads. It was so different from the city he had grown up in, so foreign and strange.
‘The air is so hot here’ Cam remarked as they made their way.
‘You’re just not used to it’ Wonderland replied keeping up with him. ‘I think it’s rather pleasant.’
‘So where are we?’ Cam asked, glancing about him at the stalls where all sorts of exotic merchandise was being bought and sold, the people around them dressed in thin fabrics made of bright colours.
‘We are close now’ Wonderland gleamed, pausing and glancing all about her, shoulders hunched with excitement and eyes roving about the environment. ‘It’s so close now Cam’ she breathed. And then she turned to him, a light shining in her eyes. ‘You’ve achieved on your own what an empire could not do in a lifetime. You’ve done more in this short time’ she spoke, ‘than your father ever did.’
‘My father was weak’ Cam replied, slowing to a stop.
Wonderland blinked at him.
‘I don’t like this’ Cam uttered. ‘People who hide in the shadows. They are cowards.’
‘And they would be fools *not* to be afraid of you’ Wonderland replied.
Cam turned to face her.
‘There is so much still wrong with this city’ Wonderland went on. ‘But you will fix it today. This strongest faction, the one at the heart of all the pain still within this place, they will be destroyed by you. It will be easy. Once the strongest have fallen, the rest will follow suit.’
‘Where are they?’
Wonderland tilted her head to the side, her hair falling about her face.
‘Down that set of stairs’ she told him. ‘Do you see it?’
‘I see it.’
‘That is where they are…the underground…organisation. All that is vile and painful. That is where it is.’
‘What is that place exactly?’ Cam asked. ‘Will in find my troubles there?’
‘Down there’ Wonderland said to him, ‘is the home of the man who runs the whole thing. He has made a huge amount of wealth from other people’s suffering. He has a huge amount of power and influence in this city, but that ends today.’
‘And is he down there now?’

Wonderland bowed her head, hand going to her mouth.
‘Yes’ she said. ‘But…’
‘But what?’
‘Don’t be too angry at what you find.
Cam glanced at her, then slowly turned his head towards her.
‘What do you mean?’
‘I mean…’ Wonderland spoke tentatively. ‘I don’t know how best to explain. You had just better find out for yourself.’
Cam gritted his broken teeth, facing the dark stairs again.
‘Go on’ Wonderland urged. ‘Get it done.’
Cam took a step forwards, reaching the top of the stairs.
He paused only for a moment, even in the bright day around, the stairs before him descended into darkness.
Cam let out a slow breath.

Wonderland approached from behind as Cam moved closer to the door at the bottom of the stairs. She remained were she was in the streets, simply watching.

It was dark inside the building, the rooms were hot, the air was so close.
Cam struggled to see, what light was present was only dim, struggling to shine through the small windows high above, the sun beyond was bright.
Cam’s metallic hand came to his mouth then, trying not to cough through the incense that was heavy in the air.
He made his way forwards, finding a door at the end of the narrow twisting corridors. The only door that was not open.
Cam reached his hand out, metallic fingers splayed over the wood.
He pushed the door open and was surprised by what he saw.
Cam tiled his head, squinting into the room as he struggled to see. There were no windows here, the darkness was kept at bay by lanterns hanging about the place.
It looked like a study, with a bed at the back, a large one, four-poster.
Cam stared at the bed hard, realising there was a figure in the bed.
He took a step closer, and the figure let out a whimper.
Cam faltered, realising it was a young boy.
‘What the fuck?’ he mumbled to himself.
Cam stepped closer again, and the boy leant back on the bed away from him. At this distance, Cam could see his expression. The boy was terrified.
‘What are you doing here?’ Cam spoke harshly to the boy.
The boy did not answer.
As he approached the figure who let out a cry of panic, he realised that the boy must have been only about fourteen in age.

He leaned over the boy who crawled back up against the bed towards the headboard and away from him.
Cam grabbed the boy's knees then, parting his legs and staring down.
The boy stared back at Cam with wide-eyes, frozen in terror.
Cam narrowed his eyes, it was difficult to see in the dark, his sight was blurry. But he saw the blood on the sheets, the blood on the boy's thighs.
Cam felt a streak of pure rage course through him. But he managed to control himself. He took a slow breath to calm his racing heart, looking back into the boy's eyes.
'Who did this to you?'
The boy let out a whine then, a croak rising from his throat.
'I won't hurt you' Cam said to the boy, leaning back and withdrawing his hands. 'I'm going to kill the man who did this to you.'
'He's….' the boy croaked. He turned his head to the side then, eyes wide as he glanced towards the corner of the room.
Cam followed the boy's eyes, turning slowly and lifting his head.
The boy on the bed jumped in fright as the door was thrown open, controlled by Cam's magic.
Cam pulled the man from the cupboard, dragging him to the centre of the room.
'*You*…..'
Cam sneered down at the man, an older man, fifty in age or thereabout.
'You're disgusting' Cam hissed as the man sat back on his heels. 'I find it amazing that people like you exist in this world.'
'Are you going to kill him?'
Cam looked back to the boy who had spoken. The man behind him stared up in fear, body rigid and unable to speak.
'Yes' Cam replied, speaking to the boy. 'He will die. But not here, not now. I will make him suffer.'
Cam blinked slowly.
'Where did you come from?' Cam asked the boy. 'Do you have a family?'
'My family are dead' the boy replied quietly, 'I was bought….'
Cam could not hide the disgust and hatred upon hearing these words, sneer from his lips, he snarled and gritted his teeth.
'Come here' Cam said gently. 'Can you stand?'
The man on the floor then opened his mouth and spoke. His words were abruptly cut as his mouth was slashed.
The man's hands went to his mouth in shock as blood gushed from between his fingers, eyes wide in fear as he held himself.
Cam had used his magic to silence him, but he had not even looked at the man.
'I can't' the boy gasped, shifting on the bed and grimacing. 'I can't move…I…c-can't stand.'
Cam moved around the bed, standing over the boy.
'It's ok' Cam spoke softly to the boy as he flinched, drawing back a little away from him. 'I'm not going to hurt you. I'm going to help you.'
The boy relaxed slightly, letting out a sigh as his shoulders lowered. Cam leant down carefully, putting his arms beneath the boy's naked body and lifting him gently.

‘It’s cold’ the boy gasped, feeling the metal of Cam’s arms.
‘I know’ Cam spoke quietly.
‘You’re going to save me?’ the boy asked him. ‘You’re…going to get me out of here?’
Cam stared down at the boy.
‘You’re not afraid of me?’ Cam asked, feeling the boy’s emotions by his magic.
‘Not anymore.’
Cam blinked slowly at the boy, lifting his head then to the man still kneeling on the floor, holding his mouth as the blood still poured profusely.
‘Walk ahead of me’ Cam spoke to the man, doing so in just barely a whisper. ‘I won’t ask again.’
The man rose to his feet swiftly, moving past Cam, frightened.
‘Careful’ Cam warned the man quietly. ‘Stay ahead of me. Right where I can see you.’

‘What happened?’ Lucy gasped in shock as she saw Cam, who still held the naked boy in his arms.
Cam had carried the boy back to the palace. There was nowhere else for him to go, and Cam felt responsible for him now.
Cam was unable to reply to Lucy, not sure of what to say.
The boy glanced up to Cam, before looking to Lucy again.
‘He saved me’ the boy spoke up. ‘I’ve heard stories about him. But I was always locked away. I didn’t believe that he really existed.’
‘What happened?’ Lucy asked the boy, still reeling from the strangeness of everything around her.
The boy swallowed the lump in his throat. He looked up to Cam again.
‘Can you put me down?’ he asked quietly, and Cam did so, straightening up again.
The boy turned to face Lucy now, still completely naked.
‘There’s blood on you’ Lucy said, seeing the boy’s naked thighs. ‘W-why?’
‘I was raped’ the boy replied.
Lucy was taken aback. She raised her head, her attention drifting over Cam’s shoulder now, where there stood a man.
‘That’s him’ Cam answered, confirming her suspicions before she could ask the question.
‘What is he doing here?’ Lucy sneered in disgust. ‘I cannot have such a man near me.’
‘Don’t worry’ Cam spoke calmly. ‘He will suffer.’
Another figure approached them then. It was Wonderland.
‘I will care for the boy’ Wonderland said to Cam. ‘He can stay here at the palace.’
‘Fine’ Cam said. ‘I want him cared for. Have a healer see to him.’
Wonderland curtsied to Cam silently.
‘It will be done’ she said to him with a smile, straightening up again.
The man was taken away to be locked away in a cell, he would be dealt with later.
His would be an unfortunate and unpleasant end.

Cam and Lucy returned their attention to the boy now, as the man was escorted by a guard out of the hallway and towards the dungeons.
Wonderland smiled at Cam and Lucy, before looking at the boy too.
'What is your name?' Wonderland asked the boy.
'Rafel' the boy mumbled.
'Come on Rafel' Wonderland gleamed at him, unfurling her fairy wings at that moment.
The boy drew back in surprise then, but he was not afraid.
'Come on' Wonderland said again, extending a hand for him to take. 'We'll give you somewhere nice to stay. We'll give you clothes and good food and a bed. You will be happy here I promise.'
Rafel took the fairy by the hand tentatively, without much hesitation. He allowed himself to be led away.
'What's going to happen now?' Lucy asked Cam, still watching the boy. 'So horrible' she added to herself in a mumble.
'There are men I have to kill' Cam grumbled to her. 'I…. have their leader, the head. But I need the rest, and there are many.'
He turned to face Lucy then, blinking slowly
'There are some drugs you could take' Cam offered her, 'to help you sleep, so you are not afraid.'
'I have seen enough' Lucy sighed tiredly back at him, hugging herself. 'I am not afraid.'

The man's screams rang through the city. The air was still, and his voice travelled far.
Cam stood beside the man on the balcony, the rapist, as he was slowly flayed alive, before the eyes of the people to see below them.
They watched in fear as the man was slowly killed, his agonising screams high and twisted as he begged for his life. But Cam did not listen.
He directed his magic with precision.
It took many long minutes for the man to die, and when he did, the sudden silence was deafening.
Cam stared at the dead man, the raw muscle beneath flesh, his discarded skin on the floor, and the blood, pooled between the cracks in the flagstones.
He let out a sigh.
'That was fun' Wonderland said to him then, standing beside Cam. 'Well done. You're actually really good that this.'
'No' Cam mumbled. 'I just know how to use my magic.'
He turned his eyes onto the faces of the men in chains below him, the prisoners, the other members of this rogue organisation that had been captured. The last that was left in this world he needed to eradicate.
'That is the last of them' Wonderland said excitedly, turning away from the dead man tied to the wooden frame beside them, and looking over at the heads of the prisoners below, who were separated from the crowd by a line of armed soldiers. 'After that' Wonderland continued, raising her head to Cam's, 'the world will be yours.'
'Why do I feel so dead inside?'

‘It’s because….’ Wonderland soothed, reaching out and touching his arm tenderly, ‘you have to do all these horrible things, but you have achieved great things through this pain.’
‘I don’t feel that I have…’ Cam whispered.
‘Just do what you need to do’ Wonderland said to him, drawing her hand back and stepping away.
Cam lowered his eyes, stepping forwards towards the edge of the balcony, squinting at the prisoners below.
Immediately beneath him chained to the ground, were the many men, the criminals of this organisation, the thieves, rapists, murderers and all bad people.
The citizens of the capital watched from a safe distance, kept separate from the prisoners by the soldiers.
As the fires began to rise, burning the prisoners alive, the citizens could feel the heat of the flames upon their faces as the men were slowly killed. But the fires were controlled, and the people were completely safe.
They watched in fear, some in awe, as the men were burned alive, their collective screams rising through the still air.
Upon the balcony behind Cam, Wonderland began to smiled, and from one of the windows in the palace above them, a young boy watched. It was the boy that Cam had saved. As he saw the men die before his eyes in the courtyard below, he felt no fear, only joy.

When it was over, Cam wandered the streets alone.
It was evening now, and the air was cool. Only during night time in this part of the world was the atmosphere comfortable, the days were always so hot, even in winter.
The streets were silent. Not even women were out at this time, not like back home.
Cam slowed to a stop, seeing something on the ground before him, a discarded item. He bent down to pick it up, holding it close to his eyes.
It was a flute.
Cam stared at it intently, feeling a great sadness swelling inside of him.
He vaguely remembered a time when he could play, but the face of the man that had taught the instrument to him, he could not remember, nor could he remember his name.
Cam lowered his hand slowly, dropping the flute to the ground, overcome with sadness and despair.
‘I don’t remember him’ Cam mourned then, ‘neither his name or face…. all I remember is that he was kind to me. *What was he called?*’

Cam felt a sensation then, there was a presence near him, however it was not Wonderland as he initially thought, but someone else.
Cam turned towards the figure who hid now, feeling his fear.
'It's alright' Cam spoke clearly. 'I will not hurt you. I know you are afraid. But I will not hurt you.'
He saw a faint shape before him as the man stepped out from around the corner of the building, making himself known.
'So, it's true then' the man spoke in a trembling voice. 'You…. can really do amazing things. I have heard so many tales.'
'Don't' believe mere stories' Cam replied. 'People have a way of embellishing.'
'But there is no embellishing with you' the man said, keeping his distance. 'I…. I saw what you did to those men before…. they…. your magic is…. truly incredible. Its beyond anything I heard you were capable of.'
'Are you angry at what I have done?' Cam asked.
'No' the man replied shaking his head. 'In fact… I wanted to thank you.'
Cam reached his magic out to him again, feeling his thoughts and emotions, and he felt no hostility there.
'Come closer' Cam said to him. 'My eyes are failing.'
The man moved tentatively forwards, his attention fixated on Cam.
'You're…...so different' the man mumbled.
'I have lived through so much' Cam replied meekly. 'What is your name?'
'I….' the man fumbled nervously. 'My name is Abela…I'm a gypsy.'
Cam narrowed his eyes at the man, struggling to see him in the dim light. He recognised the bright clothes of a gypsy, his dark skin.
'I wanted to thank you' Abela said to him again. 'You…you killed those men. Many around me said it was horrible. But I saw it as a justice.'
'Did you?'
'Yes.'
Abela relaxed slightly, straightening up, letting out a slow breath.
'I…. those men they….' He let out a sigh, and Cam felt by his magic, the man's heart flutter with nerves. 'They hurt my family' he said. 'They…...raped my younger siblings. They are dead now, but I felt happy to see in the end that justice was done. At least to a certain degree. Those men are dead, and for that I am grateful.'
Cam did not respond, giving him a level expression.
'Thank you' the Abela said to him. 'You…you gave me justice, you gave me closure. You gave me peace of mind.'
'Are any of you family still alive?' Cam asked quietly.
Abela glanced behind him then, Cam following his sight, saw a smaller figure, standing in the shadows a short distance away. He saw nothing but a dark silhouette, a shadow, the head bowed.
'My younger sister' Abela smiled, tears streaming down his cheeks now. 'She has lived through something awful…. but she is alive…thanks to you.'
He looked back at Cam, continuing to cry silently.
'Will she be ok?' Cam asked. 'She is so afraid.'

‘Yes’ Abela said. ‘She has not spoken yet but…’ he broke off again. ‘I was overcome with joy to get her back…. I just….’ He broke off yet again, suddenly unable to speak, overcome with emotions. ‘*I just wanted to thank you*.’
‘I’m glad’ Cam mumbled. ‘Thank you for coming to me.’
Abela dipped his head, extending his hand to Cam then.
‘Goodbye’ he said. ‘I am so grateful for this opportunity to speak with you. I didn’t think I would get it.’
Cam reached out also, taking the man’s hand in his own briefly, moving gently so as not to hurt him, his metallic fingers feeling nothing of Abela’s touch.
‘Where will you go from here?’
‘Away’ Abela replied. ‘Far from here.’
Cam watched as the gypsy turned and walked away, bending down to pick up his little sister, before disappearing from sight.
‘I wish you all the luck in the world’ Cam spoke after him in the ringing silence. ‘You do not deserve to suffer this way, you do not deserve to live in fear. Go and seek happiness, wherever your path might take you…’

‘What do we do with the boy?’ Wonderland asked Cam later when he had returned to the palace.
It was the dead of night now, and outside was totally dark. The clouds overhead were thick, rumbling in the distance with the threat of rain and thunder. The stars could not be seen.
‘You mean…’ Cam questioned, raising an eyebrow at her.
‘Rafel’ Wonderland said. ‘The boy you saved.’
‘It doesn’t really matter.’
‘You saved him didn’t you?’ Wonderland prompted. ‘Don’t you care what happens to him now?’
‘Of course I do’ Cam mumbled. ‘I care for all of them. I don’t want a single person who does not deserve it to suffer…. even those I have and never will meet. I care about every single person.’
‘You saved a lot of people’ Wonderland gleamed at him happily, ‘but by getting rid of this cruel organisation, you created another problem. Now the hundreds of people they owned have nowhere to go.’
Cam let out a heavy sigh.
‘They have no home now’ Wonderland finished. ‘What will you do about this?’
Cam could barely answer, hands going to his face, his metallic fingers grasping his black hair, which had become so long now.
‘Perhaps you need time to rest and think about it’ Wonderland said to him, placing a hand upon his shoulder. ‘I will handle things from here.’

‘I don’t know if I can do this’ Cam hissed through his broken teeth. ‘I don’t know if what I am doing is right anymore…...I……I’ve come this far but….’ He whispered. ‘Is this the right thing? Killing all these people? Is it right for me to do this even though they are evil?’
Wonderland stepped forwards briskly, grasping Cam’s shoulder tightly and leaning forwards to whisper into his ear.
‘Don’t you dare begin to show weakness now, not in front of all these people who look up to you. Even though many fear you, there are even more who love you, worship you…like a god.’
Cam gritted his teeth, straightening slowly then, lowering his hands as he raised his head, standing tall once more.
He let out a breath, blinking slowly. Wonderland let go of him, drawing her hand back.
She turned and simply walked away, batting her large fairy-wings as she went, leaving Cam alone in the silent corridors of this strange and foreign palace, in this strange and foreign kingdom.

That night, Cam woke up screaming.
Lucy sat bolt upright in the bed beside him, heart hammering in her chest as she glanced about in fear and alarm.
‘Cam?!’
Cam threw the sheets back, falling from the bed and stumbling away.
Lucy ran after him barefoot across the room.
She found him in the corridor a short distance away, kneeling on the cold floor and screaming, head in his hands.
‘*CAM WHAT’S WRONG?!*’
Lucy fell beside him, horror coursing through her.
‘It hurts so much!’ Cam screamed. ‘I’m in pain all the time! I can never rest….IT NEVER STOPS. PLEAS GODS JUST LET IT END! *I don’t want to live anymore!’*
‘Cam please calm yourself’ she begged, tears streaming down her cheeks. *‘Please just stop…’*
‘Lucy’ Cam gasped, calming somewhat as he lowered his hands from his head. ‘Is…is t-that you?’
‘I’m here’ she sobbed, putting her arm around him and resting her head on his shoulder, continuing to cry. ‘*I’m here for you Cam*. Don’t forget…. that I’ll always be here for you…no matter what.’
‘I’m sorry’ Cam heaved them, chest rising and falling. ‘I’m just…. *a mess*.’
‘What happened?’
‘I’m just…. all I feel in despair. I am evil. I do horrible things…I kill people…. I torture then and…. I enjoy it…because they deserve it but…’ he gasped then, clutching at his heart as if it pained him. ‘I hate myself…. I hate everything I’ve become. Things weren’t meant to be this way’ he uttered. ‘Why do I have to keep on living…...if only to suffer…?’

‘Cam….’
‘I have horrible nightmares’ Cam whispered, touching his head softly. ‘It’s like the souls of the people that have died by my hands…the ones I’ve tortured…it’s like…they are haunting me. It’s like they are watching me even now…. all around me…. oh gods.’
He glanced up then, eyes wide and roving all around the corridors.
‘I can feel them’ he gasped, his breath quickening again, ‘all around me…. even now.’
‘There’s nothing here’ Lucy said to him. ‘It’s all in your head.’
‘I cannot get away from it’ Cam wheezed, struggling to breath as his chest tightened further. ‘I cannot escape from my own mind….’
Lucy tensed suddenly as a shadow fell over her, glancing up to see a plague-masked figure standing over them. Vergil took the mask from his face, kneeling before them.
‘Cam’ he spoke in a gentle tone. ‘It’s alright.’
‘Vergil is that you?’
‘Yes’ Vergil whispered. ‘It’s ok, I am here.’
Cam let out a breath, lifting his head and staring into Vergil’s face.
‘I cannot see you…’
‘I am here’ Vergil said, cupping Cam’s face now. ‘Can you not see?’
‘My…’ Cam said shaking his head, ‘my eyes…. I cannot see….’
‘It’s ok’ Vergil told him softly. ‘It’s going to be ok. I am here. I’m not going to leave you.’

Cam rose to his feet, allowing himself to be led away by Vergil.
Lucy followed after the both of them, keeping a short distance.
They were watched by a figure a distance away down the corridor, hidden from view by the darkness. The only light that could be seen now, was the faint light from the moon beyond the window, fighting to be seen through the heavy clouds. It was a warm and humid night.
‘What’s wrong with him?’ the boy asked.
Wonderland came up behind Rafel then, standing there with her arms folded, watching the figures ahead as they walked away, disappearing from sight.
‘He’s been through more than you know’ the fairy answered the boy.
‘Why does he look like that?’ Rafel asked. ‘Why is he that way?’
Wonderland sighed wearily, bowing her head and closing her eyes.
‘It’s a long story’ Wonderland said, ‘but…. know he is here to make the world a better place, despite how he goes about it. He saved *you* after all. Never forget that.’
‘I will never’ Rafel breathed. ‘He took me from that horrible place. I was not there long but…there were other boys older than me. They had been there for years. I feared very quickly that I would suffer in the same way…being raped every night by who knows how many men…thank heavens I was only used once.’
Wonderland pursed her lips in distaste upon hearing this, turning to the boy then and unfolding her arms.
‘The reason he acted the way he did when he first saw you…. did you notice?’
‘He was angry’ Rafel answered, ‘he was furious.’

‘It’s because of what he saw’ Wonderland spoke to him, eyes out of focus as she stared away at nothing. ‘What he saw that was done to you. You don’t know this but…when the king was a child, he was raped.’
‘Really?’ Rafel said in awe, turning back to the fairy.
Wonderland lifted her head to stare down the corridor where Cam had gone.
‘It first started when he was a child, he was very young. It happened for years. He suffered at the hands of someone he should have been able to trust, someone who should have protected him, respected him. But things didn’t turn out that way. This man was abusive. He used to beat him, rape him, it happened often, for years. But Cam always kept his abuse secret. He always kept the man to himself, in order to protect his brother.’
‘You mean…’ the Rafel spoke slowly. ‘That really happened to him?’
‘Yes’ Wonderland said in a distant voice. ‘But Cam is no longer the victim he used to be, no longer that frightened little boy. He’s been through so much, suffered things you couldn’t even image. And now he is stronger for it. He can at last control his own powers, his magic is strong, without limit. No one in this entire world is like him, but in his mind….’ Wonderland trailed off. ‘He is broken’ she finished. ‘He…’ she swallowed uncertainly then, a frown upon her face. ‘He is suffering in his mind now. I can feel the conflict within him.’
Wonderland looked like she wanted to say more, but she suddenly broke off.
‘He is really something special….’ She spoke to herself quietly.

Cam slept late the next morning, waking well after midday, but when he did wake, he still felt exhausted. His eyes hurt, and his mind felt heavy.
Cam sat on the edge of the cushioned bench, head in his hands. His head was throbbing painfully, and his face on the left side was twitching slightly, though he did not notice.
Glancing about and finding himself on the balcony overlooking the garden, he vaguely began to remember the events of the previous night.
He had come here with Vergil the night before, and they had talked together, for hours, until Cam fell asleep upon the cushioned bench.
Cam still felt the touch of Vergil’s lips upon his. He touched his own mouth then, feeling the cold of his metallic fingers and letting out a sigh, allowing his hand to drop again.
Cam rose to his feet gingerly, moving towards the balcony wall. The sun was hot now, and the city spread out far, was bustling. Cam saw movement in the streets beyond the palace garden before him, but could hear nothing, save for the ringing in his ears.

Lucy came to see him later that day.
The air was beginning to cool. Cam was in the garden now, it was a beautiful garden, filled with fruit and brightly coloured flowers and fountains and winding paths. It was so different to the gardens back at his own palace home. These gardens were of a different style, the fountains made of a faded brown stone. Exotic birds danced and washed themselves in the shallow pools, and all around him was the sound of trickling water. Even he could just about hear it.
Cam stopped beneath one of the trees, looking up to the large peaches above his head.
He reached up to touch one of them, caressing it gently in his metallic hand.
'I wish I could feel how soft they were.'
'Cam!'
He looked around to see Lucy then, dropping his hand.
'Did you not hear me?' she asked him.
'No' he mumbled. 'Were you talking to me?'
'It doesn't matter' Lucy spoke clearly, moving forwards and stopping before him. 'I came here to see if you were alright. I couldn't find you, I thought you might be in the library but…I saw you through the window.'
'I see.'
'Are you alright? Wonderland tells me you're not eating.'
'I can't feel' Cam mumbled, staring up at the peaches that hung from the tree branch above his head. 'I remember peaches have lovely skins, sort of….velvety on the outside…. almost…and soft. But I cannot feel it, not with my hands. I miss being able to feel. I miss it more than I ever thought I would.'
'Cam…'
'I'm fine' he replied shortly.
'Are you not hungry?'
'I have no appetite.'
'You have to eat something.'
Cam let out a sigh, turning to face Lucy and fixing his eyes upon her, one milky, the other blue. He lifted a hand slowly as he watched Lucy, covering his blue eye for a moment, before taking the hand away.
'If it will make you happy' Cam said to her, 'I will eat.'
'We could eat together' Lucy offered.
'Alright.'
Lucy reached for one of the hanging peaches, taking one in each hand.
'I don't have a knife to cut them' she said.
'I could cut them.'
The peaches were split suddenly into many pieces. Lucy put them down on a nearby garden table, looking at her hands.
There were no marks there on her flesh. Cam had used his magic, and had managed to cut the fruit she held, but not her skin.
Lucy said nothing.
'Here' she said, holding out a piece for him to take.
Cam stepped forward, eating it right out of her hand.

He chewed and swallowed, letting out a sigh.
‘Lucy…’
‘Hm….?’
He stepped forwards, embracing her then.
‘Thank you’ Cam whispered, holding her tenderly in his grasp.
Lucy did not speak.
She raised her arms slowly, holding him back.

The next day Cam was sitting alone in the garden. Still in this foreign land so far from home. Cam tilted his head back towards the hot sun, feeling the sweat upon his brow, as he watched the brightly coloured forms of the birds fly about him. They were a kind of parrot he assumed; and were always in small groups. They had short curved beaks and beady little eyes. They were loud in the garden, but Cam did not find this disturbed him.
He sat here alone for a long time to be with his thoughts, just resting in the same place.
From time to time Lucy would come to him, or one of the other figures in a plague mask would, either Vergil or Wonderland, sometimes one of the others would visit him, out of either curiosity or amusement or whatever reason. But this was not often.
Most of the time nowadays, Cam remained alone, and this was how he liked it, staying away even from Lucy.
On this day, Cam felt a presence nearby.
He straightened slightly, mind gradually coming back to attention as he glanced around towards the source.
‘Who’s there?’
And then he saw a small figure step out from behind one of the bushes. Cam realised suddenly it was the boy Rafel.
‘It’s you.’
‘So, what I’ve heard about you is true’ Rafel mumbled. ‘You are magic, you can sense people around you.’
‘I can feel people’s emotions around me’ Cam said to the boy. ‘I can feel what they feel…to a certain degree.’
‘That’s amazing’ the boy breathed, stepping closer.
‘I can feel what you feel now’ Cam said to him, ‘and you are not afraid of me.’
‘No’ Rafel answered shaking his head slowly. ‘I’m fact, I’m interested in you.’
Cam let out a weary sigh, blinking slowly.
‘Wonderland told me about you’ Rafel went on. ‘She…told me what you went through….in the past. That you experienced the same thing as me.’
Cam turned away from him then.
‘You mean the rape?’
‘Yes’ Rafel answered shortly.
‘It’s true’ Cam answered sullenly. ‘I experienced it. It lasted for years. The person I was back then was weak, and powerless. I could not protect myself.’ Cam swallowed the lump in his

throat, gritting his teeth. ‘I thought at one point that…. he could kill me’ Cam finished. ‘But them it happened again years later…. even after *him*.’
Cam fell silent, head bowed. Rafel stared at him, waiting for him to speak.
‘Who was it?’ Rafel asked quietly.
‘A member of the council’ Cam answered. ‘Someone who should have protected me. His name was Brioke.’
Rafel dipped his head.
‘He brainwashed me’ Cam said, ‘I reached a point where in my mind…. I *needed* him, because I could not fend for myself. I was lost when I was alone. I needed him. It took an extraordinary thing to break free from the cycle. But it wasn’t easy. I didn’t realise I could survive without his guidance, even with the abuse I…. was almost afraid to lose him, afraid to be on my own. Then so suddenly one day it happened, but I received better guidance.’ He let out a heavy sigh, seeing in his mind a figure dressed in bright clothes, with dark hair and tanned skin, but he could not see his face. ‘A gypsy found and cared for me…he taught me to play the flute……. sadly, I do not remember his name….’
Rafel glanced up at him. ‘What happened to him? The one who hurt you I mean?’
‘He is dead now.’
Rafel’s shoulders slumped then, letting out the breath he had been holding. ‘It’s the same for me too’ he uttered. ‘The bad man who hurt me is dead now as well.’ Rafel raised his head to Cam again. ‘I’m sorry that happened to you’ he said to Cam. ‘It’s so horrible. You didn’t deserve that.’
‘I survived’ Cam grumbled back. ‘I am still alive and he is dead. I am still alive….’ He trailed off.
‘Life is hard’ Rafel answered simply. ‘I learnt that from a very young age.’
‘I bet you did. Some people are born into wealth and comfort, others are born in the streets. Life is not fair, but that’s just the way it is, not only in this world…. but other worlds I have seen…. perhaps it is the case in every world that exists. Inevitability.’
‘I wanted to see you’ Rafel said Cam then. ‘You’re so interesting to me. Like a legend.’
‘I am nothing.’
‘Why are you always so sad?’
‘I have lived through so much’ Cam replied in a monotone. ‘I have suffered…have done terrible things.’
‘I would give anything to be like you.’
It took a few moments for the words to sink in.
Cam began to laugh weakly.

It was a few days later, when the boy’s mother had been found.
It had been assumed that she was dead, and Rafel had stopping thinking about her some time ago. But now a woman came forwards, pleading to see her son again. When Rafel emerged from the palace, his eyes lit up, and he ran into the woman’s arms.
The woman was sobbing, crying hysterically as she held the boy to her, clutching him tightly as if afraid to let him go.
Wonderland stepped out from behind Cam as he watched this scene unfold.

‘I never thought this would happen’ Wonderland smiled, hands pressed over her heart. ‘It’s such a wonderful thing…’
Beside her Cam stood, on his other side, was Lucy, watching the reunion before them, her eyes dead, her demeanour relaxed.
‘It is nice’ Cam spoke weakly, ‘that at least amongst all the chaos, good can still come from a situation.’
‘What will you do now?’ Wonderland asked Cam, turning to him.
‘I have done what I needed to do. I have killed all the bad people, which makes me the only bad person left.’
Wonderland gleamed a wide grin then, eyes shining brightly as she steepled her fingers excitedly.
‘What fun!’ she breathed.
‘I am ready to go home now’ Cam said, ignoring the fairy. ‘Lucy?’
She did not speak, but reached out to him silently, taking his hand in her own.
He did not feel her touch, but he felt his arm move slightly and he glanced down.
‘Thank you for being by my side’ he breathed, ‘you don’t know what it means to me.’

They left these hot lands at last, leaving behind the dead, the people that were left alive, now inherited a new kingdom, a pure kingdom, where all the bad people had been purged.
Cam had chosen new leaders to care for this kingdom, no longer his kingdom. He gave it back to the people. It was theirs now, but he could return anytime if need be.
He chose the best people to rule these other kingdoms. He knew their intentions and could read their thoughts. He had gained this ability from the great demon, the beast he had fought alongside the creature Beloved. Since then, he could feel people’s true feelings, their true intents. He chose people who loved him, worshiped him, who approved of what he had done. They ruled these kingdoms as Cam intended, as he had left them. Some places he had come to had taken some work to fix, others, upon hearing of Cam’s powers and influence, gave up their lands and rule to him without a fight. Many a king bowed to Cam’s rule, dropping to their knees before him in submission.
And so, began the thousand-year long peace, which was only achieved, through bloodshed.
It was all thanks to Cameron, the Prince of Light, a WeatherMaker, and the first of his kind.

He returned to his own home now, back to the palace, the place he always returned to, throughout his life.
He always came back here.

His family welcomed him home. His brother was there, and Valery also, and Miranda, more of a mother to Luke's children than she ever had been to her own sons. The children were there also, waiting for Cam's return.
Roy and Lily ran to him excitedly, leaping into his arms. Cam could not help but break into a wide smile as he knelt to catch them, lifting them both up as he rose to his feet again.
He loved these children, even though they always saddened him a little, because they constantly reminded him of his own child, his own son whom had died because of him. Whom he had killed.
'I'm so glad to see you both' Cam smiled at the children.
'We missed you' Roy cried happily, holding onto him tightly.
'I missed you even more' Lily giggled into his shoulder.
'I missed you too' Cam spoke then, 'both of you.'
Lucy stood behind Cam now, watching the children from a few steps away.
'How are you Lucy' Luke said to her, looking past Cam. 'Are you well?'
'Yes' she sighed, giving Luke a weak smile. 'I'm just tired.'

Cam's first night back at his home, it happened again.

'CAM WHATS WRONG!?'
Cam threw himself out of his bed, crawling across the floor and sitting back on his heels, gasping and panting and sweating. The air around them within the room became heavy suddenly, vibrating and humming in their ears, before this sensation eased off.
Cam fell forwards on his hands and knees, leaning forwards on his elbows and gasping deeply.
'I'm a mess' Cam gasped. 'I…I…'
On the other side of the room was Lucy, leaning back against the wall, shoulders rising and falling in silent panic.
'My mind is fraught' Cam gasped, '……Lucy?'
'I'm here' Lucy breathed moving swiftly forwards.
'Where are you?' Cam breathed, reaching forwards in the dark. 'Lucy! I can't see you!'
She rushed towards him then, falling to her knees before him and embracing him, holding him tightly.
Cam's arms wrapped around her smaller frame, holding her desperately to him, his body wracked with sobs. His breath coming in wheezes as he gritted his teeth, struggling to breath.
It took him a long time to calm down.
After this, Cam sat at the table, head in his hands.
It was still very late, and the room around them was dark.
Lucy approached him, placing a lantern upon the table before him.

‘Can I get you anything?’ She asked.
‘No.’
‘What happened?’
Cam closed his eyes, falling silent for a moment.
‘I had a dream. No. Could I call it that?’ he asked himself. ‘It was awful. I just wanted to die.’
Lucy sat at the table, taking the seat opposite him, reaching out to take his hands in her own.
‘I’m worried about you’ she spoke sadly.
‘There is nothing I can do. There is nothing…. *nothing*….’ he swallowed. ‘No one can help me. I am on my own, and I have to do this.’ He fell silent for a moment, his eyes one milky and one blue seemed distant, seeing nothing before him. ‘I just can’t wait until this is all over’ he mumbled.

‘This should help you’ Wonderland said to him, stirring the powder into the glass, the liquid swirling around, the powder quickly dissolving. ‘It will taste bitter’ she said handing it to him, ‘but it will help you.’
‘How will it help?’ Cam mumbled, leaning with his elbow on the table. Lucy had gone back to bed. It was just Cam and Wonderland alone in this room together.
‘It will make you feel numb’ Wonderland said to him, ‘in body and in mind.’
Cam finally took the cup from her, staring down at the liquid it held.
‘How long do I have left to live?’ he asked her, in a deadpan voice.
‘How could I know?’ Wonderland replied sombrely, standing back and folding her arms, her fairy wings bowing slowly. ‘How could any of us say how long we have left?’

Wonderland moved across the room as Cam lay down, resting upon the sofa now fast asleep. He would not wake for several hours, not until the sun was high in the sky.
Wonderland began to put away the ingredients, working slowly. She paused suddenly, raising her head.
‘Children’ she spoke softly, ‘what are you doing here? You should be in bed.’
Roy and Lily came out from hiding then, stepping out into the open.
‘Why are you awake?’ Wonderland smiled, kneeling and coming to the children’s level. ‘You two should not be here.’
They ran to her, both hugging her around the neck.
‘Can I see your wings?’ Roy asked her excitedly.
Wonderland who had hidden her wings for a brief time, immediately revealed them again, the glassy dragonfly-like wings were beautiful and large.
‘I love them so much’ Lily cried out happily, reaching out to touch one of them, ‘they feel so nice.’
Wonderland chuckled warmly then, squeezing the children to her.
‘I’m cold’ Roy mumbled.
‘I’m sorry’ Wonderland replied to him quietly. ‘This palace is so cold all the time.’
At that moment the door to the room opened, and Miranda stepped in.

‘Fucking children’ the muttered under her breath. ‘You two trying to get in trouble?’ she whispered to them quietly. ‘Why are you here?’ she asked them both.
‘We wanted to see Cam’ Roy said to her innocently. ‘Something is wrong with him.’
Miranda frowned down at Roy, before glancing across the room, towards the sleeping figure of her son upon the sofa.
‘How is he?’ Miranda asked Wonderland. ‘I heard what’s been happening.’
‘He’s been….’ Wonderland sighed. ‘It’s been hard for him’ she finished. ‘I gave him something to help him rest. His nightmares’ she broke off again. ‘They’re getting quickly worse.’
‘And the drugs will help?’ Miranda asked, glancing at the table where Wonderland had mixed the medicines.
‘Yes’ Wonderland replied. ‘They will numb the pain, but it’s not a permanent solution. It’s more like a plaster.’
Miranda stared at the fairy sadly, before looking away again towards her son.
‘He looks so peaceful’ Miranda uttered.
‘He won’t wake’ Wonderland said to her, still holding the children, each in an arm. ‘He sleeps heavily now.’
‘I never wanted any of this for him’ Miranda spoke with regret.
‘We never get what we want or expect in our lives’ Wonderland replied shortly. ‘That’s just the way it is.’

Miranda took the children away, taking them back to their beds. Wonderland left Cam in that room to rest. Here now in one of these rare moments, he rested without disturbance, and no dreams came to him at all, good or bad.
‘How is he?’ Vergil asked the fairy as he met her in the corridor outside a short time later.
‘Well enough’ Wonderland replied promptly. ‘Though…. I don’t know how long this can continue’ she said.
Vergil frowned then, looking away.
He was deeply concerned.

Many days passed.

‘Lucy, what are you doing still awake?’
‘I wanted to see you.’

‘Why?’ Cam asked her flatly.
‘Because’ Lucy answered weakly, ‘…. because….’ she trailed off.
She bowed her head, reaching out to take his hand in her own.
Lucy turned his hand over, running her fingers across his metallic palm.
‘Come to bed with me’ she said to him. ‘I want to….be with you.’
Cam let out a sigh, tilting his head at her.
‘Please’ Lucy whispered, raising her head to him again. ‘We have not laid together since…. before you left.’ She swallowed the lump in her throat, staring back at him sadly. ‘I love you Cam’ she whispered. ‘I really do….’
‘After everything I’ve done?’ Cam said to her. ‘Do I not scare you? Are you not repulsed by me?’
‘No’ Lucy mumbled. ‘No, I don’t feel that. I still…. I still…. love you…’ she forced herself to finish. ‘I don’t like what you are doing, all this suffering and pain but…you must do what you must do. I just…’ she looked away, thinking about her next words. ‘I want to know if you still love me’ she said to him, looking back. ‘We’ve known each other for so long and….’
Cam let out a sigh.
‘I don’t know how you can still love me’ he sighed. ‘After everything I have done….to us and to other people…. well…’ he finished, shaking his head. ‘I suppose….no…. that’s in the past. Now is all that matters.’
‘What is going to happen in the future?’ Lucy asked him tentatively. ‘What is going to happen when all this is done?’
‘I don’t know’ Cam shook his head. ‘I just don’t know….’
‘And do you still love me’ Lucy asked him, almost fearful of the answer.
Cam breathed a heavy sigh.
‘Lucy’ he mumbled. ‘I have never stopped loving you, despite how I may act. I have loved you the moment I first laid eyes on you when we were children. I saw you and…. gods you were so beautiful.’ He sighed again, shaking his head. ‘How can you love me?’ he asked her. ‘After everything I’ve done.’
‘We don’t choose who we fall in love with’ Lucy mumbled.
‘Perhaps you should have stayed with William’ Cam told her. ‘He….’
Lucy grasped Cam’s hand, pulling her back with him.
‘I want you Cam. It’s always been you. My entire life….it kept coming back to you.’
Cam caressed her cheek tenderly, leaning forwards to kiss her.
They moved back into the bedroom, Cam helping Lucy to undress quickly, taking off his own clothes.
He pushed her onto the bed, bearing over her, but she sat up, rolling on top of him and straddling him.
Her hand went to between her legs, lifting her body.
Cam relaxed his body, craning his head back. He let out moan then, as Lucy lowered herself onto him, letting out a breath, her cheeks already flushed.
She moved her hand across his chest, caressing him tenderly, before leaning forwards to kiss him again.

Afterwards, Lucy lay on her side with her back to Cam, hugging the sheets to her and eyes wide, unable to sleep, her mind fraught with worry.
Behind her Cam lay on his back completely naked, his body an ugly sight. Scars covering his body on one side, his teeth broken, eye milky, his mismatched mechanical arms. In his youth he had been handsome. That memory of who he used to be felt almost like a dream, almost like that person had never existed.
Cam opened his eyes wide suddenly, rising from the bed.
'Cam?'
'Stay here' he ordered her, walking out of the room completely naked.
But it was only seconds after he left, that Lucy gathered the sheets together to cover herself, following after him though maintaining a distance as she watched him from afar.
'Cam?' she hissed to him urgently. 'What's going on?'
Though he did not hear her.
He continued to walk down the corridors of the palace, not caring that he was naked.
He passed a guard standing like a statue at his station.
The guard tensed slightly, surprised to see the king standing here before him, wearing no clothes.
Cam turned to stare at the soldier mutely, before turning away.
Cam struggled to hear and see, but since he fought the great demon alongside Beloved all that time ago, he had gained the ability to sense more that was around him. He didn't rely on hearing and sight alone anymore. Now he could hear people's thoughts, feel their intentions, especially if they were strong. This night he felt Lucy's love for him was true in her heart and mind, alongside the pain and uncertainty, even as they had made love. But now Cam felt something else, a person that wanted to hurt him.
Cam took a step back bowing his head, before throwing it back, eyes wide and staring towards the ceiling.
His magic shot out to the darkness above, grabbing the man that crouched there amongst the beams and pulling him from his hiding place.
The man groaned in pain as he hit the ground hard.
Cam stared down at him calmly, the guard beside him looked shocked.
'Y-your majesty' he fumbled. 'I…I did not see…'
'Silence' Cam ordered the guard, before turning back to the man he had pulled from the ceiling.
'After everything you have heard I have done' Cam said to the man, 'you think you could assassinate me? I am stronger than the gods.'
'Stories can be exaggerated' the nameless man snarled, sitting up and rubbing his body where he had fallen. 'You're a monster!'
'Yes' Cam replied calmly. 'I am.'
The man kneeling before him then looked past Cam.
'Don't look at her' Cam said, knowing he was looking at Lucy who stood a distance behind him, body covered by the sheets. 'If you look at her again I will burn your eyes out of your head.'

Cam spoke so calmly when he said these words, so casual.
The man looked back at him.
'I am everything the stories have said of me' Cam told the man. 'Everything and more. I know you value the old ways…'
'You know nothing of me' the assassin snapped.
'…I know you thrived in times before I returned' Cam continued without pause, ignoring the man's words. 'Those bad things I allowed to happen, times where the few strong preyed on the many weak. People lived in fear because of me.'
'People live in fear of you now' the assassin hissed.
'Yes' Cam said raising an eyebrow, 'but now…. only the bad.'
Cam breathed a heavy sigh, blinking slowly.
'Now' he said to the man. 'Scream for me.'
The assassin instantly began to scream, falling on his side to the ground and clutching at his body, curled up in a ball.
Cam withdrew his magic from the man only briefly then, glancing back at Lucy and turning so that he could see her face.
'You might not want to see this.'
'I am not weak' she snapped angrily at him, and as Cam reached his consciousness out to her, he could feel inside she was conflicted.
He turned his back on her, looking towards the man that lay on the ground before him, reaching his magic out towards him once more.
The man began to scream again.
'WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME!' the man howled in agony. 'STOP PLEASE STOP!'
Cam began to laugh weakly, drawing his magic back slightly to give the man respite.
'Oh, you remind me of myself' he chuckled. 'The self I used to be.' His expression turned sour then, his lip curled in disgust. '*How pathetic*.'
The man continued to scream again.
'My powers are very real' Cam said to the man, though he knew the man could not hear him, through all the pain and his own screams. 'Does this bother you?' Cam spoke casually, turning to the soldier beside him, whom had gone completely pale. 'You feel sick' Cam told the soldier. 'I can feel it. And what I'm saying right now is only making it worse. I frighten you.'
He drew his magic sharply back then, and the man before him lay on the floor gasping deeply, his body trembling violently, he began to sob.
'I will have your name tattooed in large letters in your back' Cam told the assassin calmly, 'so that your friends will recognise you when I put your skin up for display in the streets. You will die. But not before the agony, and I can make it last.' He paused then, considering the man beneath him. 'You should have stayed at home today' he told him shortly, before addressing the soldier beside him. 'Take him away' he spoke quietly, and the guard moved forwards quickly to comply, taking the man and hauling him to his feet.
Cam watched as the soldier dragged the man away, who was hunched over now, sobbing and trembling in fear and shock, the pain he had experienced in his body still lingering.
Cam turned his head then towards another figure that approached.
'Here' said the female voice, handing him a black cloak.

This figure was not Lucy, but another figure.
Cam took the robe, covering his body then.
‘You look good’ the figure before him smiled.
Cam looked down at himself before glancing up again at the masked figure.
‘Is this a joke?’
The figure took a second mask from beneath her cloak, stepping forwards and pressing it gently over Cam’s face.
The plague mask, was something Cam had been familiar with since he was a child, when he had seen it for the first time, worn by Auntie.
‘You would fit the role well’ Wonderland said to him.
‘I am not one of you’ Cam told her, pushing the mask away from his face. ‘I never will be.’
‘You can if you want.’
‘I don’t.’
He glanced behind him then, seeing Lucy still standing there, holding the sheet to her and covering her body.
Cam blinked slowly. A smile tweaked his lips as he stared back at Lucy.
When he looked forwards again, Wonderland was gone.
There was no sign of her, she had vanished so silently and so suddenly.

Many weeks passed, and people continued to be killed within the capital.
Luke saw many people suffer horrible deaths at the hand of his brother. He saw many people be killed over several days, their deaths lasting for hours on end, their screams echoing through the palace and the city around, for everyone to hear. People were afraid, but they stayed silent.
On nights on end, people were flayed and burned alive in the palace gardens.
Lucy heard, but she stayed away from the windows, the children on the other hand, Roy and Lily, would watch everything, faces pressed against the glass. Behind them, Miranda would watch also. Her demeanour was relaxed, and there was no expression on her face, no emotion within her. She watched passively, feeling nothing.

On one of these following days, Luke approached Cam.
‘This is too much’ Luke told his twin in a steady voice, glaring at the man before them tied to a great wooden frame, driven deep into the ground.
The man continued to scream as Cam used his magic to flay him slowly. His directions precise as he peeled the man’s skin back.
It was night-time. The sky overhead was dark, but the gardens were lit by great burning torches, some of these torches had people inside.
‘This is enough Cam. So many people have suffered. This is enough. Stop this already!’

‘It’s never enough’ Cam answered his brother, his voice barely audible as he spoke in a mumble.
It was strange, when Cam spoke, it was as if he were not really there, inside.
The words came out of his mouth, but it was as if he were not aware that he was speaking them.
‘I hate this’ Luke hissed, his voice breaking as he glanced towards the dying man with tears in his eyes. ‘End his pain already’ he said, as the man still screamed.
‘I am not done yet.’
Luke grabbed Cam suddenly, wheeling him around to face him.
‘Cam please stop’ Luke begged. ‘You’re hurting me!’
‘The pain you have suffered is but a fraction of a shadow to what I have suffered and endured and lived through for so long’ Cam answered him. ‘And I endured it for you. So many times I just wanted to die. To give up.’
Luke let out a sigh, releasing Cam then, stepping back.
‘What happened to you?’ Luke said to him. ‘Since you’ve returned you’ve been different.’
‘I will never stop loving you brother’ Cam said to him. ‘You are everything to me.’
‘Why are you this way?’ Luke replied. ‘I miss the person you used to be.’

Many more weeks passed, and the cruelty did not stop.
‘I will never hurt you Luke’ Cam told Luke turning away, walking away from yet another confrontation. ‘I will never hurt you.’
Luke’s eyes flashed as he turned on the spot, keeping Cam in his sights.
For many days tension had been rising between the two.
‘We’ll see about that.’
He barrelled into Cam, grabbing him around the middle. Cam stumbled, trying to free himself from Luke. The second Cam turned; Luke punched him upwards, striking him beneath the jaw.
Cam’s head was thrown back. He staggered back, hand going to his mouth where there was blood. He had bitten his tongue when Luke struck him.
Cam lowered his hand and straightened, facing Luke head on.
‘I won’t hurt you Luke’ Cam said. ‘I will never hurt you. No matter what you do to me.’
Luke snarled in rage, stemming more from the fact that Cam refused to fight back. He charged towards his brother again, grabbing him around the shoulders and swinging him around, throwing him to the floor.
‘I won’t fight you’ Cam shouted at him, ‘I won’t use my magic against you! Not again! Not ever!’
‘Fight me!’ Luke screamed at him, bearing over him and coming to kneel on his chest, shoulders rising and falling as he heaved deep breaths. ‘Fight me!’
‘I won’t.’
‘Fight me!’
‘Never!’

Luke balled his fist, swinging it back before punching Cam hard in the face, then again with the other fist.
He kept up this onslaught for several seconds before relenting, gasping deeply and body shaking. Beneath him Cam stared up at him calmly, as if nothing had happened. His face was swollen and bloodied. But Cam did not seem to notice the pain. His hand came up to Luke's shoulder. He pushed him gently off of him. Cam rose to his feet, calmly walking away.
'I love you brother' Cam said to Luke, calmly glancing back at him as he went. 'I will never raise a hand against you; will never use my magic against you, never. Ever. No matter what you do to me. I will never hurt you.'
He left Luke alone, kneeling and glaring after him as he left the room.

Many weeks later, Cam stood alone on the balcony of the tower he used to visit as a child. Once upon a time, it had been the one place in the palace from which he could see the outside world, back in the day when he was a prisoner in his own home.
The masked figure slowly turned towards him.
'Look at what you are now' Vergil said to Cam. 'And look at what you used to be.'
He cast his hand out, and Cam saw a vision of himself before him, a vision of himself as a child, curled up in a small ball and crying into his hands.
Cam stared at his younger self with no expression, no feeling.
'I don't want to be weak' Cam mumbled quietly. 'Not ever again.'
'You've grown beyond what anyone thought ever possible' Vergil said to him. 'You are the strongest person in this world' Vergil figure told him. 'None of us have ever in our lives seen a being as powerful as you. You are more godlike than the rest of us. You are mighty. You alone have brought peace throughout this entire world, and many other worlds besides.' Vergil smiled. 'You are a prodigy. You would do well to join us.'
'That would mean one of you would have to die……there can only ever be eight.'
'You're right' Vergil said. 'There can only be eight of us. But you could kill anyone of us with no trouble.'
Cam turned away. 'Why would I want such a thing?'
'You could live in our world and live as we do.'
'Why would I want such a thing?' Cam repeated. 'Auntie died for the same reason. I could never…'
'You've killed before' Vergil told him.
'This is different.'
Vergil smiled silently. 'You are an incredible person' he told him. 'There has *never* been one like you.'
'I must go' Cam said.
'What are you going to do now?'
'I have everything planned out' Cam spoke in a low voice. 'But…there is something I must do…'
Cam rose and walked away.
'Where are you going?'

Cam paused, standing in the dark with his back to the masked figure.
'I've done so much' Cam said, 'but there is still more…there is always more…' He raised his head. 'I am glad to have at last returned to my own world…but I still have ties to other worlds…people who still love me…who care about me…and who I care deeply about in turn.'
'You're going to see them again?'
'Yes' Cam whispered. 'I must.'
He raised his hand, casting it out before him and opening the portal on his own. Raising his head, he stepped forward into the wall of light, and left his world.
'Cam' Vergil smiled after him once he had gone. 'You *have* done so much. You are now stronger than all eight of us put together……you can even open doors to other worlds now……I doubt there is a being that has ever existed anywhere that is as powerful as you. You…are truly god-like…'

The first world Cam chose to come to, was the world he had been told was called Bloodsin.
The streets were busy. It was night time.
The beautiful lights shone brightly all around him, lighting up the city that would otherwise be black in the heavy night.
It was late, but still hectic, and as Cam stepped forwards, leaving the pavement, he walked across the road without looking. The cars that drove towards him slowed gently to a stop, their drivers confused and wondering what was happening and how.
Cam reached the other street, pausing for a moment.
'I have to find this child' he spoke to himself.
'Do you want some help?'
'No' Cam replied to the masked figure without even turning. 'I can do this on my own…I don't need your help.'
He strode forward, ignoring the figure behind him.
'You are something else' the masked figure spoke, nodded and smiling to himself. 'You are a special being indeed.'
Cam knew this place. This was the city he had come to when he had first entered this world, and although it felt like a lifetime ago, the streets were so familiar to him. Though he had spend only a short time here.

He retraced his steps, finding Tracy along the way.
She was alive after all, and she still worked in the same café she did before. She appeared at first to be as she had been last time they had met, but when Cam looked more closely, he saw her expression dampen when she thought no one was watching. She had seemed to age a bit, even though it had not been that long. There was grey in her hair, her eyes seemed more tired, and her skin more creased.
Stress Cam thought. *It must have been hard to lose your child like that, especially since you don't know what happened to her*. He sighed to himself. *You don't even know if she is dead or alive. But it's ok…I will put this right…*

It took him weeks to find her, but at last he had succeeded. He had followed his old tracks to the area where he had given the baby to the three rogue ghouls, where he had watched the female take her away.
Now here she was. She had grown up a lot; she must have been about six or seven now, and as Cam watched her playing in the park, he saw that she was happy.
He watched her for a few more days, just to make sure that it was really her, and after that time, there was no doubt in his mind. It was her. The three ghouls he saw there also, and he was pleased to see that they had cared for her. They seemed to love her, as she seemed to love them. The female ghoul was the closest to her, acting like the child's own mother.
Cam could see they loved each other very much. He was glad that the child, along with the three ghoul guardians, were all still alive.
On the day he decided to approach them, the four ghouls were all together.
'It's you!' the female ghoul said in disbelief. 'Oh my gosh. You've changed so much but it's still definitely you! What are you doing here? I thought you'd never come back.' She paused. 'What happened to your arms?'
Cam ignored her, instead approached the young girl, who he could instantly see was scared of him, he didn't need to see her expression clearly, nor use his magic. It was clear in her demeanour, the way her body tensed, the way she held her hands together before her, drawing back slightly.
'What is your name?' Cam asked her.
'It's Lucia' she replied timidly.
Cam glanced behind him to the other three ghouls who waited nearby, watching him closely and with curious expressions, waiting to see what he would do next.
'Lucia' Cam said back to the child. 'Your mother is waiting for you.'
She girl's eyes slowly widened, and she drew a deep gasp.
'My mother? My real mother?'
He walked with her a short time later, heading back to the town he had come from, the town where Tracy lived and worked. With him, went the three ghouls that had cared for her. The female ghoul, the young male ghoul and the older male ghoul.
Tracy was at work at this time. Her eyes widened as she saw Cam, recognition showing clearly in her expression. And then she saw the young girl that walked behind him, though she did not react.
Of course she wouldn't, Cam thought. *Would it even occur to her? After all this time she's probably accepted she will never see her child again.*
'Cam' Tracy gasped as he approached her. 'What are you doing here?' Her attention drifted back to the three ghouls behind him briefly, before flicking back to Cam.
'Tracy' Cam began. 'I have found your daughter again.' He stepped to the side so that Lucia could be clearly seen.
'What?' Tracy gasped.
'This is your daughter' Cam told her. 'Her name is Lucia.'
Tracy stared down wide-eyed at the child. For several moments she did not move or speak, and then silent tears began to roll down her cheeks.
'*I-is it true*?' she whispered.

‘I took her because I felt we were both in danger’ Cam briefly explained to her. ‘I'm sorry. It must have devastated you. I left the house with her to find Nathan. I was trying to protect her, but Nathan was killed by the organisation, you probably know that by now. I could not return to your home, so I gave her away.’ He looked to the three ghouls behind him then. ‘They cared for her’ he said. ‘They looked after her all this time.’
‘Oh my gosh’ Tracy gasped, clapping her hands over her mouth, face contorted now as she began to cry openly. ‘Is that all true? D-did you care for my daughter?’
‘Yes’ the female ghoul answered. ‘Cam was in a state when he came to us, but he cared for the baby regardless. He was worried about her; he truly cared for her to the point where he would give up on his own life.’
Tracy looked back now at the young girl.
‘Her name is Lucia’ Cam told her again. ‘She is your daughter.’
Lucia lifted her head, gazing wide eyed at Tracy.
‘…mother?’
Tracy cried out, falling to her knees and hugging Lucia tightly, Lucia crying too and holding her mother back.
By the time Tracy looked up, Cam had already walked on, moving past them.
Tracy stood, holding Lucia to her, the other three ghouls standing close by.
They looked about for Cam. But he was already gone.

The next world he had come to was the world he had been tortured in. The world in which he was given that white worm. The one that had crawled around his head for days, even weeks, maybe months.
He wasn’t sure how long exactly.
He came to this world, and ended the war on their behalf, the war which had continued in the years he had been gone from this world since before the time he had first entered.
He freed the prisoners of war, killed those that still caused trouble and harm and pain to those who only wished for their own life of peace. He took several of their animals, carried a calf in his arms as he walked, leading the mass of hundreds of people as he went. The calf had been born deformed, but Cam would not kill it.
Many had suffered deeply because of the war, and for many years had had horrible lives.
Many wanted a new start. Cam gave it to them.
He opened the portal, and led the hundreds of people, with their many animals, to a new place.
The world he came to was the lonely world. The empty worlds, where nothing lived, but plants, trees and flowers and grasses.
Cam put the calf down. The creature flicked its tail, instantly taking several wobbly steps forwards and bowing its head to eat at the grass.
The people who came after him through the portal gazed about them in wonder at this new world. There were smiles upon their faces as they surveyed their new environment, their new home.
Cam cast his gaze about at the people around him. He saw all sorts of people here. Old people, people both male and female bearing scars indicating they had been tortured. There

were babies, young children, several of which stood on their own, having lost their parents, or hung in groups. There were several women who were pregnant, several men who were injured, with bandages around their heads, or hobbling on crutches, or missing a limb.

'The land here is rich' Cam told them as they gathered around him. 'No animals live here, but this world is flourishing with flowers and plants. Cut the trees down and build your homes, build pens to keep the cattle and sheep in. Build roads, build temples. Live here, flourish, have children…be happy here. This is your world now.'

Cam spent the next several months moving back and forth from the lonely world and the world that had been ravaged by war. The lonely world was huge, and empty. He spent this time moving between the two worlds, leading people, leading animals from one world, to the other.

In a very short time, the people in the once lonely world were thriving. Homes had been built, the livestock was breeding on its own, several lambs had been born, as had calves and foals too. Cam stood alone watching as a young boy stood in a paddock, the grass that had grown there now only a clear dirt patch. He stood in the centre of the paddock, lunging the young horse tied to the end of the rope, the whip he held in his other hand he used only to lead the animal, as he encouraged it to run first one way, and then the other.

A few weeks later, Cam saw the same young boy with the same horse riding through the little village. The horse had been broken, and Cam watched the two together, seeing clearly the bond between them. The boy loved the horse, as the horse loved the boy. It followed him as he walked beside it, picking up its pace with him as the boy ran, running to a particular point in its field as it had been taught, and returning to its master when called.

Cam sat by the steps of one of the buildings weeks later. It was a shop; the people came often as the flow of customers through the door was steady. He watched a patch of earth near him. Weeks ago, it had been just a patch of dirt. Now many vegetables grew here.

The people made farms and harvested their own crop. Cam stood at the edge of a small paddock thick with mud, watching the pigs happily wallowing in the muck, rolling around and covering themselves in it to save their skin from the sun shining brightly above. He saw several squealing piglets with their mother, separated from the others in another paddock. He watched as several pigs were led away to be slaughtered, their meat would feed many.

He watched a young couple fall in love, a young man of about seventeen confessing his love to a pretty girl with blond pigtails. They were always together; they walked together, worked in the village together, and spent their leisure time together.

It wasn't long after that, when one of the pregnant women who had come here, gave birth to the first child in this world.

The whole village gathered around her to celebrate when she presented her baby, a healthy baby girl.

'Who knows what will happen here in the future' Cam said to himself, sitting on the lip of a small hill that overlooked the new village that had been built before him, a village that was growing and thriving.

He smiled as he saw a bee fly past him, even digging in the earth to find a worm, in the sky too, several birds from the other world had been set free. Cam saw two of them now, flying above him. Two little sparrows.

‘I have done all I can’ he said to himself, looking back at the village as a monument was erected to him, a stone structure in the centre of the village. They worshiped him now for his powers, and for all he had done for them.
He had given them a new life.
‘I think’ Cam mumbled to himself rising to his feet, ‘that it’s time to go. They’ll be ok now.’

The world after that, was the one he was most anxious to go to. Most anxious, and nervous.
The new world the masked figure had brought him to when he had nearly starved in the empty world. The world he had been given both his new arms. The world he had met Beloved, Magnet, Pink and Selye and all the others.
He entered the second facility he had come to, the one in which Beloved lived in.
She stepped up to him slowly, expression unreadable as she approached.
The two stopped before each other, each staring at the other.
‘I thought you were dead’ Beloved whispered.
‘No’ Cam shook his head, speaking quietly back.
‘I'm…’ Beloved spoke, voice trembling. ‘I thought you might have died.’
She bowed her head again to hide her face. When she next looked up, her eyes were red, with tears trickling down her cheeks.
‘Can you kneel?’ she asked him. ‘So that I can hug you properly.’
Cam stared at her for a moment, before kneeling.
Beloved stepped forward, falling into him, breathing in his scent, as she rested her cheek against his shoulder, arms wrapped around him.
‘I'm so glad you're alright’ she sighed.
‘As am I’ he replied, ‘I am glad you're alright.’ He smiled then, closing his eyes. ‘I didn’t know demons could cry…’

She came with him then, back to the first facility he had been brought to.
People were scared. They ran from her. But Beloved didn’t care. She walked by Cam’s side as they entered the facility.
They were approached by several figures. Magnet, Pink, Selye, Elaina and Russell.
‘Where is Sydney?’ Cam asked as he looked at each of their faces. ‘Where is he?’
‘He died’ Selye told him quietly. ‘He was consumed by grief of losing you…and he allowed himself to become weak…he gave up.’
‘Where did you go?’ Russell growled at him, grabbing him by the shoulders and shaking him.
‘You just vanished! We were so worried! We thought we had lost you…forever.’
‘I have changed’ Cam whispered to him, his eyes wide. ‘I'm sorry I left you…I had no choice.’
Russell embraced him tightly then, squeezing so tight Cam couldn’t breathe. When he let go of him, Cam drew a deep gasp, rubbing his chest as Russell clapped him on the shoulder roughly.
‘I'm so glad you're alright’ Russell said, ‘we all are.’
‘Is this’ Magnet began tentatively, glancing at Beloved, ‘the creature who took your arm? Who nearly took your life?’

‘Yes’ Cam said turning to Beloved who stood quietly behind him. ‘She helped me…we are friends now…’

He sat at the beach now, in the grassy lands that surrounded the facility, which stood tall like a city in itself, looming over the landscape around them.
Cam rested upon the thick trunk of a tree washed ashore, beside him, Russell sat.
‘Mine’ Cam began, ‘is a long story, filled with…bad things…’
Russell listened silently from beside him, watching Cam closely.
‘I had…in the beginning…in my early childhood a normal enough life’ Cam said. ‘I'm my world, I was a prince.’
‘A prince?’ Elaina who sat on the sand at his feet turned at that. ‘I had no idea.’
‘*We* had no idea’ Magnet corrected as he sat beside her, they were both facing out to sea, sitting with their backs to Cam as they listened to him speak.
‘It wasn’t something I wanted anyone to know’ Cam admitted. ‘But I think it’s time to tell you now.’
‘Why?’ Selye asked, sitting on the other side of Russell. ‘Why now?’
‘Because I think I owe it to you all’ Cam told them, ‘after everything you’ve done for me.’
‘That’s awfully good of you’ Pink said, standing facing him with his arms folded as he listened.
‘Well…’ Cam went on. ‘Let me see if I remember correctly.’ He went quiet for a moment. ‘It all started to go wrong when my father the king died. After that life became hard, and my twin brother and I lived in dangerous times. But we survived. He lived through it. Both of us, though it wasn’t easy. Our mother the queen, she never cared for either of us and so we were forced to suffer.’ Cam went silent for a time. ‘My brother and I used to escape the palace on a regular basis, at one point we lived a double life, living in the streets as beggars in a guild in the day, and returning home at night. The strange thing was, we were both happier living in the streets than in the palace; we felt safer, felt loved. The guild we were a part of, were like a family. It was a hard life, dangerous…but……’ He shook his head. ‘We were happy. Sadly, however it wasn’t meant to be. We were found, my brother and I, when we were unable to return to the palace for several nights because of some trouble that was happening in the city at that time. Our mother was furious, and so after that, we were kept in the palace, sealed in, unable to even visit the gardens. Even the windows were distorted so that we could not see anything outside, after one night where my brother and I saw a supposed heathen being burned before the palace. We lived a secluded life for years, and my brother and I grew apart. I began to push him away.’
Cam stared at his own hands, his mechanical hands, each different from the other.
He flexed his fingers slowly, watching the joints bend at his will.
‘For years I suffered because of a man named Brioke. I was the eldest twin. I was to become king, and for years Brioke controlled me, and frightened me.’
Cam’s eyes grew distant.
‘He hurt me. For years, and I was afraid of him. He used to beat me, he used to…’

‘You’ve had me once today. How many times? Isn't this enough?’

'The lesson needs to be reinforced' Brioke sneered down at him. 'I will have you as many times as I please. You are mine to command, and if you try to resist me, I will punish you for it.'

Cam bit his tongue.
'I escaped from him one day…when I could take no more. I was pursued. I was a king at that time, as I had come of age…and still I was pursued…hunted like an animal.'
The gentle waves of the ocean lapped up at the sand, as the orange light of the setting sun bled through the sky.
'After that, I was picked up by a gypsy. He was kind to me, I lived with him for a short while…before he left me behind in a village, saying he had to return to his homeland. I stayed there for a short time, I nearly fell in love, before I was found and captured, and brought back to the palace in chains.'

'Cameron the farmer' the soldier said. 'I never thought I'd see the day.'

'I was imprisoned and tortured by the men who ruled the kingdom in my stead; even my brother couldn't help me. I was sentenced to death, but was saved and hidden away, not by my brother, but by my mother who had been so indifferent to me all my life. After that, I lived in a healing house for a while, meeting my childhood sweetheart after years apart. She had grown and was a beautiful and mature woman. Her name is Lucy, and we fell in love.'
The others listened silently, all of their eyes firmly set on Cam as he told his story.
'Like the time before' Cam went on, 'just as I was beginning to pick up the threads of a normal life, it was all taken away from me, when I was captured again and brought back to the palace. Again. But this time, I fought back, and killed my captors…I…hurt my brother.'
The edges of Cam's eyes twitched at the unpleasant thought. 'Those strange masked figures have been watching me almost all of my life, strange figures like the one that brought me to this world. They agreed to save my brother's life…in return for…I don't know what exactly…they wanted me to learn to fully control my magic, and for that…I needed to travel to other worlds…'
Cam tilted his head back to the darkening sky.
'And so, I travelled, to old worlds and to new, everyday growing a little wiser, and slowly…I became what I am today. My magic used to be out of my control. It would be triggered by extreme emotions…fear…anger……but now…I am the most powerful man in my world…and many other worlds…there is no one who can defeat me. I have fought entire armies singlehanded and won. I am now the soul ruler of my world.'
His last sentence stretched into a long silence, as the others slowly processed this, until at last…one of them spoke.
'That is an incredible story.'
Beloved who sat beside Cam leant forward, smiling widely at him.
'I don't think I've met a more incredible person in all my life. And I don't think I ever will.'
Cam turned to her, smiling kindly as he placed a gentle hand upon her head.
'I've grown so strong' Cam told her. 'I am no longer the frightened little boy I used to be. I could even defeat you now if I wanted, only too easily.'

‘I’m sure you could’ Beloved grinned back.
‘You're going to leave us now aren’t you’ Selye said. ‘You're going to leave us and never come back. This is why you’ve returned now isn’t it? To say goodbye.’
‘Yes’ Cam answered mournfully. ‘It is.’
‘We’re going to miss you’ Pink said.

They stood on the beach now as darkness began to set. The others were gathered around him in a semi-circle.
He embraced each of them in turn, holding them tightly, until he came to Beloved.
She grabbed him by the front of his shirt, standing on her tip toes to kiss him on the lips, before releasing him again.
‘Will you behave yourself?’ Cam said to her. ‘Will you be good to people? Not to hurt them?’
‘I will do my best’ Beloved gleamed stepping back. ‘Thank you for everything.’
Cam turned from them, casting his hand out and opening the portal.

The next world he came to, the final one before he was to return home to his own, was the world known as Lacklustre Paradise.
The worlds in which the ‘gods’ lived in. The Eight.
‘Hey kid’ Vergil said to him quietly, standing before him. Behind him, the other seven gods watched and waited.
‘We’ve seen everything you’ve been doing’ Vergil said to him. ‘So…you’ve fixed your own world of war and destruction….and fixed others…you’ve done so much.’
‘I have suffered so much in my life’ Cam told Vergil in a dead voice. ‘You’ve all caused me so much pain and grief…but…I regret nothing. If I hadn't had the experiences in my life that I've had, if I hadn't suffered the loss…the despair…the torture…both mental and physical…I would not be the god I am today.’
‘So, you admit yourself to being a god? Vergil smiled.
‘What am I if nothing else?’ Cam asked. ‘Because of my pain and suffering, the lives of thousands…if not millions of other people have become better.’ He bowed his head. ‘I regret nothing’ Cam said again. ‘I would change nothing……if I could go back to my past…back when I was a child……I would change nothing……not even my father’s death……not even Brioke…’
Vergil tilted his head, smiling widely. Tears brimmed in his eyes, running down his cheeks.
‘I love you Cam’ he whispered.
Cam leant forward, caressing Vergil’s face as he kissed him.
Behind, the other seven hooded figures all smiled behind their masks.
‘This is what I call a happy ending’ one of the women said.
‘Oh, it’s not over yet’ the man beside her said. ‘Not yet.’
Cam stepped back from Vergil, smiling also.
He turned and walked away, leaving the dead world, the still and unchanging world that was Lacklustre Paradise.

He returned to his own world.
Cam entered his study, the place where he made his plans, the plans many would call evil. It was true as least that his plans led to many deaths, and they were all born here in this room.
Cam glanced up as he noticed a figure standing before him.
He made no effort to defend himself as the figure swung the heavy club as hard as he could across Cam's head.
He crumpled to the floor unconscious, and Luke threw down the club, bearing over him.
He bent down, lifting Cam's body from the floor and slinging him over his shoulder, struggling with the extra weight in Cam's arms. The metal.
Luke walked with Cam, carrying him away and to another place.

Chapter Thirty Six

Cam opened his eyes and found himself in a familiar situation. He learnt first through touch than what his eyes told him, the binds around his legs felt cold, which meant that he had not been in this chair for very long.
He lifted his head, seeing very little in the dark room. But he saw a figure standing before him, a figure he knew to be his brothers. There was something bright he held in his hand, but Cam could not see it clearly.
'You're awake then?' came Luke's voice. 'Good…good.'
'You do realise that I can free myself from these binds only too easily' Cam spoke calmly to his brother. 'I've destroyed buildings. This is nothing.'
'I know' Luke said straightening. 'But if you care about what I want, then you will not free yourself from those binds.' He paused. 'You won't free yourself from those binds will you. Promise me.'
'I promise' Cam replied, 'I will not free myself.'
Luke moved closer to him. Cam couldn't see him clearly; all he could see in this poor light was a blur. But he saw the thing in his brother's hand, the thing that glowed, though he wasn't quite sure yet what it was.
'I'm going to torture you' Luke said, waiting for a reaction.
When Cam gave none, Luke grabbed him roughly by the hair, jerking his head back and holding the glowing thing above him.
'You said you wouldn't resist me' Luke said. 'You promised.'
It was then that Cam realised what the glowing thing was, he saw it close to his eye, felt its burning heat.

It was fire poker, glowing red hot at the end.
Cam's heart quickened. He gritted his teeth, staring wide-eyed up at the point that was inches away from his eye.
'I won't hurt you brother' Cam whispered. 'If you want to hurt me, then I won't stop you.'
Luke pulled back slightly, his grip on Cam's hair loosening.
'You're not going to beg for me to stop?' he asked hesitantly.
'I've been tortured enough times to know that it makes no difference' Cam replied calmly. 'Even if I didn't have these powers…. I still would not beg.'
Luke didn't move, he stared down at Cam for the longest time unmoved.
And then he stepped back, releasing Cam and turning away. He threw the poker aside, the hot metal hissing as it touched the cold floor.
Luke left the room, leaving Cam in the ringing silence.
A few moments later, the metal binds holding Cam to the chair shattered into many tiny fragments. He rose to his feet, dusting himself, and then he left.

Chapter Thirty Seven

'I don't know how best to say this' Luke spoke to the wall, before turning to face to soldiers behind him. 'There is so much violence and bloodshed, so much pain and grief….no longer can I stand idly by and watch…something must be done.'
'But what?' one man said. 'The king is invincible. He has the powers of a god. There is no way we can even get close enough to kill him.'
'We could kill him in his sleep' one man said.
'Or poison him' another added. 'Even gods have their weaknesses.'
'Haven't we tried that?' a third man asked glumly. 'He never sleeps and he never eats…he never lets his guard down. Not ever.'
'Everyone lets their guard down sometimes' another said. 'And who says he never sleeps? And never eats? That's preposterous.'
'Maybe it isn't as crazy as it first sounds' another said. 'For all we know he doesn't need to eat or sleep anymore.'
'He does eat' Luke said, 'and he does sleep. But he is extremely careful with what he eats, extremely careful. And while he does sleep, he only sleeps for a few hours…. two…maybe three hours a day…he hides himself when he does. Even I don't know where in this vast palace. He suffers from night terrors and sleeps lightly. Sneaking up on him won't work…no matter how silent we are. To say he is a light sleeper would be an understatement…it's almost like he…*senses* things around him.'
'Then there is nothing we can do' a soldier said. 'He's just too powerful an opponent.'

‘So, you're saying we must submit?!’ another said angrily. ‘I would rather die!’
‘Dying is the only option if we *don’t* submit’ another soldier grumbled. ‘Perhaps it’s best…’
‘It’s *he* who shall be dying.’
All figures in the room feel silent then, all turning to Luke who had spoken.
‘The king Cameron must die’ Luke said straightening.
‘But how?’ another asked hopelessly. ‘There is no way…we can’t even get close.’
‘I am the only one who can do’ Luke said. ‘I am the only one who can get close enough to attempt it…I am the only one he will not protect himself against.’
‘You mean he would *let* you kill him?’ one man asked him incredulous.
‘I am the only one he trusts’ Luke says. ‘He won’t use his magic against me, and he would never hurt me, not even to try to defend himself.’
‘Why?’ one man asked.
‘Because he trusts me’ Luke replied. ‘Because he loves me. Because I am his brother, his twin, and he has protected me his entire life.’
‘And you would do this?’ one man asked. ‘You would kill your own brother?’
‘Yes’ Luke answered solemnly. ‘It is now my duty…to rid the world of this evil.’

Interlude start

Four masked figures walked through the world. Between them they carried a stretcher, upon which lay a man’s body. He was a young man, incredibly handsome, with blue eyes behind his closed eyelids, and pure white hair like freshly fallen snow.
His body was flawless.
The four masked figures walked on, through the woods until they reached a clearing, where they stopped, and placed the stretcher carefully on the soft grassy earth.
The clearing around them was beautiful in the morning sunlight, bathed in a golden glow; all around the leaves slowly fell from their trees, landing softly on the forest floor.
The four figures waited, standing at four points around the body and looming over silently.
They waited.

Interlude end

Cam spent his last days travelling. He had revisited the worlds he had been to already, and tied up all the loose ends, said his goodbyes, and done all that needed to be done.
Now, he was free to wander, and free to explore the places he had not yet been to.
The first new world he travelled to alone; was perhaps the strangest he had come to yet.
The days were dark, the nights were pitch black. There was no sun, only a glowing ball that moved across the sky at a far faster rate than the sun in his own world did. Very quickly in what Cam thought to be the day (or at least brighter of the two) this glowing orb moved across the sky.
'This place' Cam mumbled to himself as he watched the dark clouds move overhead. 'It's so different from what I know.'
Here Cam found very few living animals, though he travelled for many days. He only found one species of bird that lived in the woods, and the only animals on land he found were kept by the people. The people were hardened folk and lived very hard lives. Even the rich only just about survived each day. The sea Cam found was like acid and burned to the touch. Yet at least one species of fish lived here.
'What else is out there?' Cam spoke aloud to himself once he grew tired of this world. 'What else is there to see?'
Cam opened a portal and stepped through.
The next world he came to was not all that different from the one he left, but it was scarier. Frightening even. This was a haunted world, were all the people were ghouls, but not the kind of ghoul that Cam knew of. These were undead beings, with white eyes and rotting flesh.
There were no buildings in this world, no cities or towns, and the only humans Cam found lived as nomads, always travelling to escape the ghouls which hunted them at night, crawling from their graves to eat their flesh.
Cam spent only a very short time here before moving on. The next place he came to was a thriving metropolis. Here he found happiness and comfort. He made friends here and would often sit in on the balconies with the prince of this world whose name was Rhase; and drink the sweet but spicy liquid that was made from the flowers which bloomed from the trees that engulfed their entire land. These flowers were deep purple in the morning, and blood red in the evening, and deep blue at night. They were beautiful things, their vines grew far and fast, and no matter how much they were cut back, they would always grow again.
'Such wonderful stories!' Rhase declared, lifting his glass to toast Cam.
'So, you believe me then?' Cam asked. 'You believe that I come from another world?'
'Of course I do' Rhase beamed, he was a handsome young man, with tanned skin and black hair slicked back, and he dressed in all the fine clothes expected of royalty. 'How could I not believe you?' He went on. 'We are friends after all.'
Cam took a gentle sip from his glass, savouring the taste of the flower upon his tongue. 'The people in this world' Cam spoke solemnly, 'are of more an open mind than many people I have met before.'
Cam leant against the wall of the balcony beside him, casting his sights out to the world. This city was built amongst tall pinnacles of rock, a gentle orange stone that was strong. This city was supposedly a thousand years old, and had survived both the elements, and the wars. It was so tall, the city built so high in the sky, that some of the clouds were below them, drifting lazily by in the warm air.

‘I know you will have to go soon’ Rhase said, leaning forward and resting his cheek against his palm. ‘Please, while you are still here, tell me more about the other worlds. Tell me about these ghouls.’
‘Which ones?’
‘The ones with black eyes’ he breathed, chest rising as he spoke. ‘I am most fascinated about them, and my people will be most excited to hear such tales.’
‘You're going to write it all in a book, aren’t you?’ Cam enquired.
‘Yes yes’ Rhase said eagerly. ‘You have to tell me *everything*. And leave nothing out!’
On the last day Cam was to spend in this world, the prince bestowed upon him many gifts, one of which was their precious flower, a little sapling in a beautiful pot made of rare stone mined from the rocks. It was morning at this time, and the little flower was coloured deep purple.
‘A gift’ Rhase said to Cam, ‘for your lady.’
‘Thank you’ Cam bowed, taking the flower from him. ‘This is very kind of you.’
‘A small gesture’ Rhase bowed to him. ‘You have been a good friend to me in the short time we’ve spent together. I believe we have both learnt much from one another, and I will miss you dearly.’
‘I will miss you also.’
Rhase smiled kindly. He stepped forward, embracing Cam firmly.
‘Live long my friend’ Rhase told him. ‘Thank you for coming to our world.’

The world Cam came to after that, was a world of the future, far further into the future than the world he had known as Bloodsin. This was a world where the cities were built miles above the land, and the people all flew to their destinations. A world where there were no children or old people, but all people looked the same age. Cam learnt that the people in this world all were given a single tattoo of their choice in design when they experienced their first day in the world. The age of a person can be estimated based on how faded their tattoo was. Cam once in this world saw a person whose tattoo was almost entirely faded. He learnt that these tattoos faded on a man at the same rate as they did on men in his own world. They were just regular tattoos on normal flesh. But the people lived longer, much longer.
The world after that he came to was an alien world, where great orange worms with mouths like caverns soared through the sky as if they were water, feasting on the little bulbs that tried to flee from them.
The world after that he came to, was a new world where monsters lived with people, and students were taught magic and how to slay evil demons. The best in their classes became god-like figures, who protected their world from the evil forces that threatened them.
The world after that was one where vampires lived side by side with humans. Some vampires hunted on the humans, some humans killed the vampires. But for the most part they lived in peace side by side.
The world after that was a world where ‘little people’, elves they called themselves, lived forever underground, unable to ever see the sun that shone on the earth’s surface for fear of being burned alive.
After that, he came to a city underwater, protected by the great dome, and ruled by men with pale skin.

After that he came to a world where men could jump to different and strange dimensions, where the worlds were bright and the people only half human.
After that he came to a world where the animals spoke and could use magic.
After that he came to a world where angels and humans walked hand in hand.

At last he came to the world he came to know as the steam punk world. He had visited this world often, as it was the one that intrigued him the most.
The city that floated in the sky and moved across the land was made out of every type of building imaginable. Between the Victorian houses and tall brick buildings which took up most of the city, were thatched cottages, villas, and all sorts of strange and unusual buildings from every era.
The people of the city were as different as the buildings. People with pale skin, dark skin, tanned skin. They dressed eccentrically in strange clothes, and their customs were so different from that of the world that Cam had been born in.
He stood at the edge of the city, standing leaning against the wall and gazing out at the clouds before him. The strong wind blew his hair back.

Cam eventually returned to his own world, a long time later.

He found Lucy in their bedroom; she was resting on the bed, the thin sheet curled around her body as she slept.
Cam approached her slowly, touching her shoulder and leaning over her to give her a kiss.
She sighed happily in her sleep, pulling the sheet tighter to her.
Cam straightened again, moving across the room and over to the large balcony, where the double doors leading to it were open, allowing the gentle breeze to drift into the room.
Cam stood there, his metallic hands resting against the stone wall of the balcony.
A minute or so later, Lucy rose from the bed and sauntered over to him.
Cam glanced down at her as she stood beside him and saw that she was naked beneath the sheets.
He turned away again, gazing out onto the world.
‘You're back’ Lucy smiled to him. ‘At last.’
‘Yes’ Cam grumbled. ‘I am back.’
‘Where did you go?’
Cam hesitated before answering. ‘You could come with me you know’ he offered her finally. ‘There are many beautiful things to see out there.’
Lucy’s expression dampened slightly. ‘I know’ she said. ‘I'm sure that’s true but…’
‘What are you afraid of?’
‘I don’t want to leave this world’ Lucy said. ‘Not even for a moment. When I think about how vast the sky must be to hold so many worlds……it scares me…’
Cam looked ahead again.
‘I've brought you something’ Cam told her, producing the purple flower that had been given to him as a gift.
‘It’s beautiful’ Lucy said taking it.
Cam turned away from her again, saying no more.

She looked up at him, her beautiful eyes large.
‘What is going to happen now?’ she asked him.
‘More’ Cam simply replied. ‘More needs to be done.’

A day passed.

He screamed then, his magic emanating around him, causing his skin to glow, his hair to turn white. His cries echoed through the palace as he stumbled out of his room, slouching down the corridor and hugging himself.
Lucy followed after him, with less urgency now. She had gotten used to these episodes of his, it hardly fazed her now.
Cam fell to his knees, coming to stop in the corridor atop a set of stairs, hunched over, his body wracked with sobs and drenched with sweat.
‘It’s getting worse’ Lucy groaned, taking a seat on the top step beside him and putting her head in her hands.
She did not try to comfort Cam this time, but kept her distance from him, sighing heavily. It was cold.
‘Please tell me what I can do to help’ Lucy said to him weakly. She jumped then, realising there was a figure beside them, relaxing now as she recognised it. ‘Oh…’ she sighed. ‘Wonderland…’
The fairy stepped forward, wearing an expression of concern as she approached Cam.
She knelt on his other side, ignoring Lucy now as she placed her hand beneath Cam’s chin, lifting his head upwards.
‘Breathe’ she said to him, lifting the pipe to his mouth.
Cam blinked in confusion, looking back at Wonderland before leaning forward slightly, taking a heavy pull from the pipe.
His stared unseeing ahead of him, his pupils dilated. His eyes fluttered shut, and his body slumped.
Wonderland caught him, holding him close to her. On his other side watching with concern, Lucy tensed, reaching out to him.
‘It’s ok’ Wonderland said to Lucy, holding Cam in her arms and helping support him. ‘He will be ok.’
‘What did you give him?’ Lucy asked.
‘Something to help him relax’ Wonderland replied.
Lucy glanced down at the pipe Wonderland had dropped, seeing it resting on the ground now, still smoking.
‘This will help him calm down’ Wonderland explained. ‘It will make him different, he will feel less, doing these bad things will be easier for him, and he won’t suffer these dreams anymore, at least for now. At least for a short time.’ Wonderland paused, glancing towards

Lucy. ‘You have no idea how he suffers. In his mind…. there is so much…...you could not understand. I know you find this difficult. I am trying…I am working hard to make sure this will all end well.’
‘What do you mean?’ Lucy asked the fairy sadly.
‘You will see’ Wonderland replied calmly as she held Cam upright.
Cam began to tremble violently, but he had calmed now, and had fallen silent.
‘I cannot guarantee things will end as I am intending’ Wonderland said. ‘But I am trying to see that they do.’
Wonderland paused again, watching Cam sadly.
‘I am trying to see that things will end as they should’ the fairy said.

It was the next morning Cam woke late. He was alone in bed and remembered nothing of the previous night.
He sat up, feeling agony. He touched his hand to the left side of his head, his body trembling slightly. He raised his head as he sensed a figure within the room with him.
‘You cannot sleep’ the figure voiced, staring out of the window, ‘you suffer night terrors, you're losing weight…’ the masked figure turned to Cam. ‘When was the last time you’ve had a good night’s sleep?’
Cam’s eyes were heavy and his skin pale.
‘I have not slept a whole night since I returned to this world after…. after….’ he bowed his head, ‘gods, how long has it been?’
‘You're sick’ the masked figure said to him, moving away from the window and towards him, touching him beneath his chin and tilting his head back to look into his face.
‘I feel sick’ Cam whispered back, blinking slowly. ‘I feel terrible…. I am frightened all the time…….anxious all the time….I suffer flashbacks….I hallucinate….I cannot sleep…I cannot sleep…’
Cam buried his face in his hands.
‘You're dying’ the masked figure told him. ‘You're psychologically damaged beyond repair.’
‘I am…dying?’
Cam glanced up at Vergil again.
Vergil removed his plague mask then. There was concern written upon his face.
‘I can see inside you’ he breathed. ‘Your organs are failing…. your heart is barely pumping.’
Cam raised his hands before him then, feeling pins and needles there.
‘Why can I feel that?’ Cam mumbled. ‘I feel as if its flesh…’
‘That is a phantom-sensation’ Vergil told him. ‘There is nothing there.’
‘The rest of my body hurts’ Cam went on. ‘I feel…. pins and needles in my legs and shoulders…around my chest…. sometimes I feel a stabbing sensation…. *inside me*….and it hurts…’
‘It maybe that you’ve used so much magic, too much, your body….’ Vergil trailed off. ‘I don’t know, I cannot say I…. none of us know. We’ve never seen anything like you before.’
‘Am I really dying?’ Cam asked him. ‘Why do I feel nothing? Why do I feel no fear?’

‘The drugs Wonderland gave you last night were strong. They supress all emotion. You will have no more nightmares but…it will make your condition only worse. It is relatively safe to use on a healthy person for a short time, but for you, even taking this drug once will be a great strain on your body.’
And as Cam listened to Vergil’s words, he felt pain around his heart, an ache in his chest. He clutched his heart then, tensing slightly, before relaxing again.
‘Does it hurt you now?’ Vergil asked him, seeing this.
‘I….I think so….’
Cam’s body convulsed suddenly, before he let out a sigh, relaxing again.
‘I feel this strange pressure around my head all the time…I cannot concentrate…I'm always agitated…...I always have the feeling that someone it going to hurt me…and I am now *afraid* to sleep….’
‘You could die sooner than you think’ the masked figure told him. ‘If you don’t sleep…your body will begin to slowly shut down….’ The masked figure touched his chest then. ‘Your heart will eventually fail……you will die…’
‘What is it like to die?’ Cam asked.
‘Death is different for everyone’ Vergil answered calmly. ‘If you die…’ he sighed then unhappily, breaking off. ‘I don’t know how you will die when the time will eventually come, but I think you will….’ He shook his head. ‘I hope you die peacefully.’
The masked figure straightened then, slowly moving away, before vanishing.

Cam rose after a time, moving over to the window.
He stood there, gazing out at the bright sky beyond the glass.
The sun was high, it was late in the day. Cam reached his consciousness out, far towards the city, and felt peace was there. But as he did this, he felt pain within his body. It hurt him to use his own magic then, and Cam quickly released it.
He let out a slow and heavy sigh, standing there quietly, and alone.

That night, Cam looked at himself in the mirror, doing so for the second time. The first time, he had been living with Lucy in her home, back when Kanae was alive, and now, he saw himself again, and he was ugly.
In the beginning, so long ago that Cam could hardly remember, Cam had been incredibly handsome. Even after Brioke had beaten him so badly that Cam had nearly lost his life, that day Cam had been thrown from the balcony. His teeth had been broken, but he had fake teeth fixed into his jaw, ceramic teeth, better than the real thing. But then he had left his home, his world, and travelled to other worlds, where things had only changed more drastically. He could hardly remember everything that had happened to him. He had been beaten so many times, had been tortured so many times. How can one man endure so much pain?
He hardly remembered all the injuries he had sustained. He knew though how he had lost his arms, how he had been scarred so horribly on one side of his body, how he had nearly lost his vision and hearing completely. The bomb in the modern world had caused so much damage to him. And Beloved before that ripping his arm from his body.
But the worse injuries he had suffered, had been the mental ones. They would never go away.

He forgot almost completely about the worm that had been put into his ear, had damaged his mind, even now, the drugs he took made the twitching worse, but they made him numb, took away the nightmares. It gave him temporary relief, but now he learned that he was dying too.
It maybe that you've used so much magic, too much. Your organs are failing…. your heart is barely pumping.
Cam heard Vergil's words echoing within his mind, and as he raised his hands before him again, feeling pins and needles once more, though he knew this was only in his mind. His metallic arms felt nothing, not really, his mind just told him he felt things that weren't there.
Cam raised his head again, straightening slightly. He looked in the mirror before him, seeing ghoulish faces around him, dark shadows screaming at him in silence.
He turned, glancing about him with narrow eyes at all that was around him. He was confused. Glancing back to the mirror and seeing them still there, he realised he was hallucinating.
Who knows what this drug has done to me Cam thought to himself. *Who knows what my own mind has already done to itself?*
He realised then as he glanced one way, that there were moving shadows all around him, slinking around the corner and vanishing the moment he looked at them directly.
Cam looked back at the mirror with dead eyes, seeing then in the reflection, the bed behind him.
Cam turned once more, seeing Lucy sleeping there peacefully.
He used the barest amount of magic then to light the air around her, only dimly, so that he could see her beautiful hair.
She did not stir as he did this, and he watched her, calmly and silently.
Cam's attention diverted then, seeing a dark shadow above her. He reached his consciences out towards it but sensed nothing there.
It was another illusion.
Cam released his magic quickly then, stumbling back slightly and leaning back against the wall behind. He held his head as a strong sensation of nausea passed over him.
'I am truly a mess' he uttered to himself, 'I am broken…. beyond repair…...'
He gritted his teeth, raising his head as silent tears ran down his cheeks, tears of fear, for himself, for everything.
'……...what is left for me but to die….? The world should not have a vile monster like me living in it…'

It was shortly after, that Luke began to take control.
One of the first things he did, was to kill the creature, the chimera Luke's children had called Peter.
Luke ordered the soldiers to break through the door, completely destroying it.
His two children followed him as he entered the secret garden, standing behind him as Luke ordered the soldiers to kill the chimera.
Roy and Lily watched silently as the creature was impaled, the spears driven straight through the creature's ribcage.
It took seconds to die, bleeding out. It did not fight back, but slumped forward, body relaxed. Its eyes no longer seeing.

Luke turned away, grimacing then.

Minutes later Cam stepped out onto one of the balconies overlooking a hall within the palace.
Cam was confused, his head was suddenly in agony.
‘What is happening to me?’ Cam groaned, holding himself.
Beside Cam, Wonderland suddenly took off, flying away.
Cam turned, seeing Luke approaching him.
The flash of the sword Luke held shone in Cam’s eyes for an instant. But Cam did not move to protect himself.
Luke plunged the sword into him, driving the point straight through his body. Cam drew a sharp intake of breath, as the blade pierced his heart and lungs.

Cam gripped the blade sticking out of his chest with both hands, shoulders beginning to tremble. He lifted his head to see his brothers face. Luke was baring his teeth, glaring at him. There were tears in his eyes.

'Luke…' Cam whispered to him weakly, 'I….' he grimaced again, feeling the blade through his body. '*Thank you….*'

Cam released his grip on the sword, reaching towards Luke and caressing his face lovingly, smearing his cheeks with blood.

'*Live…*' Cam gasped. '*Live on…*'

Tears spilled from his brother's eyes, rolling down his cheeks, the salty water mixing with the blood.

'*Live…*' Cam shuddered again, '*live…*'

Luke tensed, gripping the hilt suddenly tighter and jerking the sword back sharply, out of Cam's body, flecking the ground with his blood.

Cam held his chest, eyes distant and swaying on the spot.

He fell to his knees, still holding his chest. He was watching his brother; there was satisfaction in his expression, and hope.
'*Luke…*' Cam whispered, in a voice barely audible. '*I…*'
His shoulders sagged, his arms dropped and he fell to the side collapsing.
Luke stood over his brother's body, trembling violently at the shock of what he had just done.
Blood from the tip of his sword dripped to the floor, gradually.
The tiny sound echoing loudly in the vast and empty place.
Cameron, the prince of light, was dead.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Luke stared down at him, breathing deeply and slowly, trying to control himself.
He dropped the sword which clattered to the floor, falling to his knees and staring down at Cam's dead body, feeling sick inside, consumed by a strong and sudden sense of unreality.

‘The king is dead!’ cried a guard from behind him, having rounded the corner. ‘May the new king live long and rein with a steady hand!’
‘May the new king live long and rein with a steady hand’ the other voices echoed as they joined the first, coming from other corridors joining.
Luke leant forwards slowly, ignoring the voices around him, he lifted Cam in his arms and rose to his feet. Cam was heavy.
Luke turned and walked away, carrying his brother in his arms. Cam’s long dark cloak trailing after them, as Luke made his way forwards, followed slowly by the few guards, and some of the council members that had been drawn here.
They began to mutter amongst themselves as they trailed in Luke’s wake.
‘Is it true?’
‘Is the King really dead?’
‘Do we have a new king?’
‘Why did this happen?’

Luke made his way through the palace, descending the many stairs as he travelled downwards. He passed his mother as he neared the entrance of the palace; she stared in shocked silence as Luke went by carrying Cam.
Miranda followed the procession that trailed after Luke, a step behind her was Valery and the children.

Luke walked through the city carrying Cam, the cloak dragging through the filth of the streets as they went. Luke was becoming exhausted carrying him, but he continued, and forced himself on, heading slowly to his destination. The holy temple.
The guards either side of the door stared in disbelief at what they saw, as Luke approached each opened a door allowing him to enter.
The Holy Ghosts within the temple, and the people who prayed all turned their heads as the heavy doors opened and Luke and the figures after him trailed in. Many began to instantly wail in despair at the sight of Cam’s body, holding each other, tears of disbelief and shock pouring from their eyes. Soldiers stepped forward with weapons raised to keep them back, as many drew closer, pawing at the air to try to reach Cam.
Luke ignored all of them, heading towards the altar and ascending the steps, arms shaking now with the effort to hold him, he gently placed Cam’s body upon the altar. The great stained-glass windows before them shone multi-coloured patches of light upon them.
Luke stepped back to see his brother’s face and body clearly.
The metallic arms, the grotesque scarring that covered one side of his face, and the burns that covered his legs, now hidden from view, from that time long ago he had been tied to a pyre, and his eyes behind his closed eyelids. One milky white, the other blue, this had not originally been his own.
Cam had suffered horribly in his short life, so much pain and fear and grief and lasting terror. Luke had wished for none of it, he had wished for none of the heartache, he had only ever wanted a normal life with his brother by his side. But things were not meant to be.
‘Stay away from this terrible place brother’ Luke said down to him, ‘this terrible life. Live now as a normal man…. somewhere far…and be happy.’

Grief enveloped him, and Luke fell over his brother's body, clutching his shoulders and sobbing into his chest.
'Brother I'm so sorry!' he wailed in despair. '*I never wanted any of this!*'
Cam's limp body shook slightly as Luke held him, empty eyes staring unseeing up at the ceiling.
'*I hate this world*' Luke whispered, grasping the front of Cam's shirt desperately. 'I didn't want to live in it without you…'
Luke leant back, his face and hands now smeared with his brother's blood from the wound in his chest.
Luke reached a hand towards Cam, running his fingers down his face and closing his eyes, before leaning forward and kissing his forehead.
'I love you brother' Luke said. 'I will never forget you.'
He straightened up, turning around to face the people behind him, blood and tears covered his face and hands. There was a crowd that faced him now, looking up silently.
'The king is dead!' Luke called out to them.
'May the new king live long and rein with a steady hand' the voices echoed back.
Luke turned back to his brother, his face screwed up in grief as one by one, the people began to slowly approach Cam's body, crying over him and sending him prayers, as word of his death trickled out of the temple and into the streets.
More came, by the thousands, flocking to the streets to see the body of the broken king, some in joy, and some in despair.
Side by side Luke and his mother stood at the head of the holy temple, surrounded by soldiers to control the people as they slowly streamed in through the door.
For hours this went on, until Cam's body was finally taken away on a stretcher and buried outside the city by the main road that led into the capital.
Immediately after his body was buried, a great shrine was built around him, for all to see who entered or left the city, and for those who wished to pay their respects. The work on the shrine was quick and finished within hours, all the while the crowd of people that had gathered around to watch stayed until the very end. When it all was done, the shrine filled with people bearing flowers. But one flower thrived. The purple flower Lucy had received as a gift from Cam, the one that had come from another world, it soon grew wild. In time it would be available at every corner of the map in this world, and be as beautiful here, as it was elsewhere.
Here, at the grave, it flourished.
As daylight rose again early the next day, the suns light shone on the new building, now awash with beautiful petals and lilies and flowers that covered every inch of the cold grey stone. Tied to the columns with string and even to the roof as people had used each other to climb up. And as the people began to sing and chant outside the shrine, Luke entered the building, standing before the statue that had been erected of his brother. Not the scarred figure he had died as, but as he should have been. Handsome.
He stood with a proud posture, with one hand to his chest, to cover the spot he had been stabbed, and the other relaxed at his side, holding a book.
Luke collapsed before the statue, overcome with grief and distress and pain.
He was carried back to the palace and laid to rest.

Two days later, he left, riding out of the city on horseback.

Three days ago

The four masked figures walked on, through the woods until they reached a clearing, where they stopped, and placed the stretcher carefully on the soft grassy earth.
The clearing around them was beautiful in the morning sunlight, bathed in a golden glow; all around leaves slowly fell from their trees, landing softly on the forest floor.
The four figures waited, standing at four points around the body and looming over silently.
They waited.
The body was still. Not breathing.
And then all of a sudden, his eyes opened, and he took his first steady breath.
He sat up, resting with an elbow upon a knee. He looked at his left hand, grinning widely.
'It worked? Is that my hand?'
He touched his own face then, feeling only smooth skin, and no scarring.
'I can see clearly now' he said beginning to laugh. 'I can see. I can *feel*.'
'Did you doubt us for even a moment?' one of the masked figures asked him leaning forwards. 'Cam?'
Cam glanced up at the figure, seeing the gloved hand of his offering him a mirror. Cam took it, staring back at his own reflection. He began to laugh out loud, touching his skin, his hair, his nose, his lips.
'Handsome' he beamed, showing himself perfect white teeth in his reflection. 'I'm perfect.'
He handed the mirror back, rising to his feet.
'I remember you' he told the figures as he looked around at the four. 'All of you' he said turning on the spot. 'But I don't know who you each are behind your masks.'
'You don't need to know' another of the figures spoke, the voice was female.
'What happened to me?' Cam furrowed his brow. 'I…I remember my own name, and I remember Lucy…' he thought further. 'I remember my body was scarred, I remember pain, but not where it came from. I remember my legs were burned, but I don't remember why. I remember…. I remember…'
'Only what's recent' a masked figure finished.
'I don't remember anything of my childhood' Cam realised. 'I don't know who my parents are.'
'You have suffered' a masked figure said. 'Horribly. Both mental and physical pain and for a very long time, most of your life in fact. We gave you a new body. Your memory reaches only as far as a few days ago when you first saw your new body; and nothing after or before that. Except for your memories of Lucy. They stretch as far back to the time you first laid

eyes on her. You chose to have everything else erased. You chose to forget everything…. except for her.'
'I remember when I first saw her from the tower' Cam realised with a gasp. 'Yes. I remember. But…' he lifted his head to the others, 'why would I choose to erase my own memory?'
'You made the choice yourself' the masked figure reminded. 'You want it to be this way. So, it's best we don't tell you.'
'Lucy' he said. 'All I can think of is Lucy. She is all I remember.'
'The love you have for her still burns strong' the other said to Cam.
'Yes' Cam nodded. 'Yes, I know.' He glanced around him. 'I know where she lives. I know she is waiting for me.'
'Before you go' one of the figures spoke up, stopping him in his tracks as he made to leave with haste, 'there is one last thing we want you to do. For your own benefit…well…for someone else's…. it's just best that you do it.'
'What is it?' Cam asked.
'Three days from now, at midday…' the masked figure said, 'I think it's a good idea if you stand by the clock tower in the town Lucy lives in. Bring her with you and wait. Wear that coat' the figure indicated, and Cam glanced down at the long coat he wore, bright blue it was and beautifully decorated. He would surely stand out in a town wearing this. 'A figure will come to see you, but he won't speak to you.'
'Do I know him?' Cam asked.
'He is someone from your past' the masked figure replied vaguely. 'You knew him before your memory was erased, and he knows you. He just wants to see if you are well, then you will never see him again.'
'Who is he?'
'It's best you didn't know.'
'But…he knows my memory was erased?'
'Yes.'
'Then why can't I know him?' Cam asked, feeling suddenly a bit sad. 'He must have been someone important to me.'
The masked figures glanced at each other, one of them sighed.
'We shouldn't tell you' one of them said. 'But the reason he wants to keep a distance from you is because he wants you to live a normal life. You didn't have a normal life before. You lived happily with Lucy for a time, until things changed.'
'All he wants' another figure spoke, 'is to see that you are alive and safe and happy. That is why he chose for things to be this way. For you.'
'So' said another figure. 'Can you do that? Can you wait by the clock tower three days from now, wearing that coat, with Lucy by your side?'
Cam stared at the blank faces of the four masked figures silently as they waited for his response.
'Yes' he said. 'I will do that.'

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Three days later

Cam stood by the clock tower, with Lucy standing by his side, she was feeling slightly nervous.
'Are you alright my love?' Lucy asked him.
'Well enough' Cam replied, placing his hand upon hers as she held onto his arm. 'I feel better with you beside me though.'
'It's going to be alright' she said to him encouragingly. 'He's just going to come and go…that is all.'
Cam looked ahead again, staring across the bustling square where people called out loudly to one another, carriages pulled back and forth by ponies led by the farmers and the typical drunkard groups hanging outside the inns.
Cam patted himself down, worrying he had forgotten something. He wore the long light blue coat he had woken up in three days ago, as he had been told.
'Stop fidgeting' Lucy whispered to him anxiously.
'Sorry' Cam whispered back, trying to relax.
He tensed suddenly, seeing at a distance a figure sitting atop a horse and moving towards him.
Cam's heart tightened in his chest as the figure came closer.
'Is that him?' Cam asked Lucy quietly.
'Yes' Lucy replied meekly. 'That's him.'

Luke rode slowly towards them, stopping beside the clock tower a short distance away from Cam, who stared wide-eyed back up at him, curiosity and uncertainty in his expression.
Luke stared down at Cam mournfully, feeling glad to see that he was alive and well again. He felt happy as he saw Lucy by Cam's side, but the joy in his heart was mingled with pain and grief.
Luke knew this was the last time he would see him, the last time he would see his beloved brother, his twin.
Luke forced himself to turn away, twitching the horse's reigns and bowing his head as he walked back the way he came.
He left in silence without speaking a word.

'Was that it?' Cam asked Lucy hesitantly as he watched the man leave. 'He's not going to say anything?'
'There is nothing to say' Lucy mumbled.

‘And you know who he is?’ Cam asked her.
‘Yes’ she replied staring away.
Cam followed her gaze, staring after the man as he kicked his horse into a trot, disappearing into the crowd.
‘You're not going to tell me who he is’ Cam said to her, ‘are you.’
‘You didn’t want me to’ Lucy replied.
Cam’s eyes became unfocused as he stared into the crowd, and he felt a great sadness stirring within him.
‘He looked so unhappy’ Cam mumbled to himself.

Cam and Lucy returned to the home they shared together.
They continued on with their normal lives, beginning together as if it were for the first time.
They started over, and despite all that had happened in the past, their love began to blossom, as it had done so before.
They loved each other and were married shortly after. Lucy living with the secret of Cam’s past, keeping silent…for him.

Interlude start

Days earlier

‘It’s this way the masked figure said leading him. Come.’
Cam followed Vergil through the building, the vast home of the eight masked figures, in the world known as Lacklustre Paradise.
They came to a bright room, in the middle of which was a single bed, where lay a figure. A figure that closely resembled Cam, or at least, the Cam that would have been, had he not lived through and endured all the pain he had done so.
‘He’s beautiful’ Cam breathed, leaning forward and touching the figure’s cheek, tears prickling in his eyes.
The figure was utterly still on the bed before him, he was perfect, unblemished. Both arms whole and the skin smooth.
‘He’s so handsome’ Cam whispered, eyed roving over the body.
The figure was naked, covered from the chest down by a white sheet.
Cam’s eyes travelled back to the face of the person. Back to the head.
‘Why the white hair?’ he asked.
‘We thought it would be a nice change’ Vergil replied.

‘And…’ Cam began, eyes moving down the body to the groin area, ‘will it…I mean….?’
‘The body will work as far as satisfying a woman’ Vergil answered with a smile as Cam lifted the sheet to see what was there. ‘But you won’t be able to have children.’
‘I see’ Cam answered meekly back, lowering the sheet again.
He looked to the face once more. The body looked so real, so perfect, as if it were a living person, as if he were only sleeping.
‘I want this’ Cam breathed gazing down. ‘I want to be him…. not….’ he lifted his arms before him, flexing his mismatched mechanical hands. ‘I just want to be….’ Cam began, ‘I want to be….’
‘Normal?’
Cam looked up.
Vergil was smiling.
‘Don’t we all’ Vergil replied.
Cam lowered his hands again.
‘You will destroy all the evil in your world’ Vergil said to him, ‘erase the harm you have caused when you were king before, all the bad things you allowed to happen, when you were a child being controlled by the council. You will use the powers you have gained and learned to control, to become a god…’
Cam stared at him, his expression fixed.
‘If you hadn't lived through all your experiences’ Vergil went on, ‘…if you hadn't suffered as you had, then you would not be the man you are today. Though I’m not entirely sure that’s a good thing’ Vergil added as an afterthought. He glanced back at Cam, speaking clearly and lifting his chin. ‘Only you can make pure your world’ he said, ‘only you have the power to rid your world of its evil, by becoming the only evil that exists in it.’ He paused. ‘It will be very difficult’ Vergil went on. ‘Many will suffer…. many will die and you will be hated by many…. but…many will love you, worship you…because they will see what you have done.’
‘And when I have rid my world of all its evil…?’
‘Then you die’ Vergil told him, raising his head, ‘and become….’ He turned to the clockwork body that lay on the bed between them, ‘…. *him*…’
Vergil looked at Cam again.
‘You will be given a fresh start’ Vergil went on, ‘…a new beginning. You can do whatever you want with your life. You will be immortal. You will no longer be tied to the palace…. you will be *free*.’
‘I want Lucy’ Cam uttered. ‘Only Lucy…she is all I care about…’
‘And your brother?’
Cam bowed his head, heart dampening. ‘I cannot….be with him…. after….’ he drew a deep breath. ‘Once I am dead then he will be king, and I will live my own life…. perhaps its best if we go our own separate ways.’
‘If that’s what you want…’ Vergil spoke quietly.
‘No’ Cam shook his head, ‘I will miss him dearly, but I think that is best for both of us. I never wanted to be king.’
‘And,’ Vergil continued speaking slowly, ‘who will you allow to kill you?’
‘My brother’ Cam said.
‘You would burden him with such a thing?’ Vergil asked.

‘I wish not to…’ Cam admitted, ‘but he is the only one I trust.’

Interlude end

Epilogue I

‘This is your last day before you die’ the masked figure said to Cam. ‘You will lose your powers once you enter your new body. Your powers will stay in your own body and be lost when you die.’
‘So?’ Cam replied dully, squinting at the shadowy figure, struggling to see him clearly, even in the brightly lit room.
‘There is something we want from you in return’ the masked figure told him, ‘…before you die.’
‘I’ll do it’ Cam replied without hesitating. ‘Whatever it is.’
‘It would not hinder you either way’ the masked figure went on. ‘And it would please us greatly.’
‘Fine.’
The masked figure moved away, standing by a bed in the room. ‘Here’ he said.
‘What?’ Cam asked shortly. ‘I can’t see.’
‘Then come closer’ the masked figure said impatiently.
Cam sighed. He took a step forwards, moving closer to the masked figure that stood by the bed.
Cam leant over the bed, staring hard at the figure that lay on the bed.
‘A woman’ Cam said straightening again.
‘She’s a woman from your world’ the masked figure explained. ‘She’s in a deep sleep. She won’t wake until this is all over.’
‘And what are you going to do with her?’
‘We’re going to give your powers to her.’
Cam fell silent, raising his head slowly.
‘You can do that?’
‘Oh yes’ the figure said excitedly. He pointed to a second bed beside the one the woman lay on. ‘Please lie down’ the masked figure said.
‘What will happen to me after this?’ Cam asked the figure.
‘We will return you to your own world.’
Cam bowed his head. He moved around silently toward the empty bed and lay down.

Seconds later, a figure leant over him, but not the one he had spoken to before.
‘Vergil?’ Cam breathed.
‘Hey kid’ Vergil smiled.
Cam felt something wet touch his cheek, and realised it was a fallen tear.
Vergil was crying.
‘Please don’t’ Cam sighed sadly.
‘I'm sorry’ Vergil whispered, ‘it’s just…this is the last time we can be together…today is the last day you will live in this body…. tomorrow, you will be killed…and when you wake up in your new body….your memory will be erased, everything you have known of me will be lost…you will forget me forever.’
‘Vergil…’ Cam uttered, blinking back tears himself.
‘No’ Vergil said, placing his fingertips upon Cam’s lips. ‘Don’t talk. This is the way it has to be. Let us just savour this moment.’
He leant forward and kissed him, moving slowly, tasting him, before breaking away again.
‘Goodbye’ Vergil spoke, ‘my love…’
He straightened and walked away, never looking back.
The next figure to lean over Cam, was the one he had been speaking to before.
‘Are you ready?’ the masked figure asked him.
Cam as he lay on the bed, glanced to the side of him, towards the woman who lay unconscious by his side.
‘This world’ Cam uttered, ‘Lacklustre Paradise….is such a strange place.’
‘I'm going to put you to sleep now’ the masked figure told him. ‘Are you ready?’
‘Yes’ Cam mumbled looking back to him. ‘I am ready.’
A spell was placed upon him.
The next he woke, he woke in his own bed, back in the palace, in his own world.
It was as if he had never left.

Chapter Forty

‘I can’t stop thinking about him’ Cam was saying to Lucy. ‘It’s been two years since I saw that man by the clock tower, and I can’t get him out of my mind. I think of him throughout the day, even dream of him…. even after all this time.’
Beside him Lucy listened silently, unsure of what to say or how to comfort him.
‘I know you tell me that…before I lost my memory…I asked you not to tell me of my past…but I have to know who that man is. I *have* to…I feel like he was someone very important to me in the past…someone I was very close to. Will you tell me who he is’ Cam asked, turning to her, ‘please?’
Lucy turned away from him, sighing deeply.
‘Please tell me of my past’ Cam begged of her. ‘*Please*. I want to know how I got here, and why things are the way they are.’ He paused. ‘Why do I have a clockwork body?’
‘Are you sure you want to know?’ Lucy asked him reluctantly. ‘I can never make you forget what I tell you if I do.’
‘Yes’ Cam said eagerly. ‘Please, this is haunting me.’
Lucy sighed again, bowing her head. ‘You told me everything that happened to you in your life…before you had your memory erased…before you lived in the clockwork body you have now.’ She blinked slowly. ‘You suffered a lot in your life, through no fault of your own.’
She raised her head to his, meeting his gaze.
‘That man’ she said, ‘the one you saw by the clock tower two years ago…is your brother.’
‘My brother?’ Cam whispered in shock.
‘Your twin’ Lucy went on, ‘…the king.’

‘I see you’ve got your memory back.’
Cam whipped around, staring wide eyed at the mysterious figure that stood behind him.
Lucy had told him everything. It had taken several hours to tell this tale, and even longer to fully process it.
Now he wandered through the woods alone to be alone with his thoughts, as all he had learned slowly sunk it.
It had been such a shock. Lucy had told him everything that had happened to him, everything. In great detail. Including the rape and torture. She had begun her tale where everything had first gone wrong.
When his father the king had first died.

Cam had been walking alone through the woods when he had been found by the figure. The figure wearing a mask of a crow, but with large glass eyes like windows, behind them was nothing but shadow. The figure wore black all over, the cloak was black, the hood, even the gloves and books also.
'You're one of the masked figures that have watched over me' Cam breathed, turning to face him fully. 'One of the eight…so it's all true then.'
The figure lifted his gloved hand, removing the mask to reveal his face.
Vergil smiled.
'Hey kid' he said quietly.
They spoke for a short time, sitting side by side on the grass beneath the trees.
'So, you say we were in love once' Cam asked Vergil, brow furrowed.
'Yes' Vergil replied.
'I didn't realise I had that sort of taste' Cam mumbled under his breath.
Vergil cast him an amused look, grinning widely. 'Well you did' he smirked. 'I was never really sure what the two of us were, but we coupled many times.'
'Hm.'
Cam pulled at the grass that grew beside him, his mind working feverishly.
'If I see my brother again' Cam asked Vergil, 'what will it be like?'
'It will be as if you never left him.'
'It will?'
'He misses you' Vergil told him sincerely, 'as much as you miss him.'
'You watch him?' Cam asked Vergil. 'Even now?'
'You and I were in love once' Vergil told him. 'And I still have feelings for you. Your brother means a lot to you, and so, he means a lot to me. I watch over him…for you. I have done all this time.'
'Thank you' Cam breathed.
'He thinks about you' Vergil continued. 'Even after all this time…I know…'
'I miss him very much' Cam breathed. 'More than anything I want to see him, to know him again, like I once did.'
'You can you know' Vergil breathed. 'I can make it so.'
Cam froze for an instant, before slowly turning to face him.
Vergil wat watching him closely, with a smile upon his face.

Days later

'Keep back peasant' one of the guards snapped angrily. 'You've no business here.'
Cam stepped away; he began to linger, uncertain of what to do.
'*Would you like some help?*' came the voice in his head. Vergil's voice.
Cam looked all about him for the source, but he saw nothing. Instead one of the guards before him spoke.

‘I'm sorry sir. We mistook you for someone we didn’t know. Please go right ahead.’
Both guards opened the doors for him. Cam walked carefully past as he made his way through the door, eyeing the guards closely until they were out of sight. He did not see anyone else as he made his way onwards.
‘So strange’ Cam uttered to himself. ‘I am powerless against these people. I don’t have my supposed magic anymore.’
‘*Up the stairs’* came the voice of Vergil again, speaking merrily in his head. ‘*No, the other ones. Now turn left*.’
Cam followed the voice’s instructions until he was deep within the palace, he came across a room, where many figures were milling out. Among them, walking at the front, was Luke.
Council meeting stuff said the voice in his head. *Your brother Luke the king attends them regularly.*
Cam frowned at the voice in his head, faltering suddenly as Luke paused, noticing him now. Clearly Cam was the last person Luke expected to see, especially here within the palace. Shock then joy quickly passed his expression in the space of a second, before Luke gathered himself and drew himself up.
‘Who are you and what are you doing here?’ Luke demanded. ‘How did you get into the palace?’
‘Brother’ Cam spoke clearly for all to hear as the rest of the council stopped to stare at the two. ‘There’s no need to pretend.’
He watched the surprise in Luke’s expression. The way his muscles twitched; the way his brow furrowed, and the way he opened his mouth as if to speak but had nothing to say. He remembered those silly little things that Luke did, back when they were children. He remembered.
‘Luke’ Cam told him seriously. ‘I remember *everything*.’

Epilogue II

A few days later

The eight cloaked and hooded figures stood around the monitor, each wearing their masks.
The crow masks, plague masks. With their large glass eyes like windows, behind them could be seen nothing but shadow. The figures wore black all over, the cloak was black, the hood was black, even the gloves and boots also were black.
They stared at the screen before them, seeing the image in the machine.
They saw Cam, a person who was very familiar to all of them by now, beside him was his brother, his twin, the king Luke, and on his other side, his wife, his childhood sweetheart.
Lucy.
‘Cam…’ spoke one of the masked figures, ‘…he has a happy ending…at last…’

On the screen before them, Cam was smiling.
The masked figures one by one turned away from this screen to face another one. They watched a scene, which was happening in the same world as the one that Cam lived in.
Here they saw a woman, the one that had inherited Cam's powers.
She had had children now, two little girls who sat on her lap.
The two children, each sitting on a knee, their mother holding each of them with an arm around their waists, smiled at each other.
One of the little girls giggled, holding a closed flower in her hand. The child looked down at it, and before her very eyes the flower unfurled its petals, growing in size and sprouting its leaves wide.
The child handed the flower to the other little girl, who took it carefully.
The flower in the other girl's hand began to frost over, turning to a shining crystal.
The mother held her children close to her, smiling warmly as she watched her daughters play with the flower. Her hair began to lighten, turning to a pure white, the air growing warm around them as she hugged her girls to her, feeling joy and love pure in her heart.
'And so…' another figure spoke as they watched the screen, '…the line of weather makers is born.'
'So' a third figure said, '…the power can be passed onto your children…then……. there will be many more of them in the future……

…...this is only the beginning…'

Epilogue III
Third and Final Epilogue and the End of this Story

Cam lived a good long life after his death.
He lived now in what you would call a clockwork body. He was himself, the self he was before, the same in every single way, save for the pain.
He knew what had happened to him, he had been told by Lucy, his loving wife.
He knew, and he remembered all of it.
He knew of the events but could not remember the pain.

Cam was happy all the time, though he lived in a body that never aged, and was immortal in every sense of the word.

He lived a happy and fulfilling life with Lucy for many years, until they decided to part ways. She loved him, but she wanted children more than anything. The one thing Cam could not give to her.
He loved her, but moved on as she did, eventually marrying another woman years later. He and Lucy were still close, and still kept in touch, but each lived their own lives now, separate from one another.

Cam would see his brother often in those days.
Their bond was strong, and they became as close to one another as they had in the olden days, back when they were children, and their life carefree. Back before their father had died.
But Luke was a king now, and he was busy most of the time. But he would still make time whenever he could for his brother. Cam saw him several times a month now.

'I'm so happy' Cam said to Luke one day, as they sat side by side upon the shore of lake after a long day of hunting. 'These days are the best.'
'Yeah' Luke said beaming. 'They are.'
'What's it like being king?' Cam asked Luke suddenly. 'I mean how are you finding it? How different are things now?'
'Things are difficult' Luke frowned with amusement turning to him, 'but far easier than it would have been…thanks to you I've inherited a peaceful nation.'

‘The work never stops though I bet’ Cam laughed, resting his chin on his palm as he smiled warmly at his brother.
‘You got that right’ Luke chuckled back.
Cam grinned widely. Luke reached an arm out to Cam, grabbing him around the shoulders and embracing him tightly, his forehead resting against Cam’s as he smiled at his twin.
‘Thank you’ Luke whispered. ‘For everything.’
Cam smiled back, reaching up, and hugging his brother in turn.
‘Whatever I did’ Cam laughed happily, ‘I would do it all over again, for you brother.’

Cam lived a long and happy life for many years, visiting Luke and Lucy often, visiting his mother and Valery also, and watching the children Roy and Lily grow up. He visited Luke and Lucy most often, until many years later, one after the other, they (Luke and Lucy and Miranda and Valery) all died of old age.
They had all lived long, healthy and happy lives, all living far longer than most would have in this world. The masked figures afterwards would say their happiness made them live longer, even Miranda, Luke and Cam’s mother, had eventually died an old age. She had been happy and active until her very last days, and she had died with dignity and a smile upon her face. She had died in her sleep.
At each of their funerals Cam was present, he sent his prayers to each of them on those days. He was sad, but he knew this day would come, and had been prepared for it for the longest time, knowing they would die before him, knowing he would not age.
But it was still hard.
‘I want to thank you’ Cam said to the masked figure afterwards, ‘for watching over them all for all of these years. I know all of you were there.’
The masked figure turned to him, speaking slowly.
‘It was my pleasure’ Vergil replied. ‘You have after all become very important to us over the years. We’ve all watched you for so very long…we cannot just forget about you now.’
Cam bowed his head.
‘Lucy has had three children’ he said. ‘Luke has had four…what will happen to them now?’
‘Luke’s eldest son will become king’ Vergil answered. ‘The other children, both Luke and Lucy’s, will live good lives.’
‘Will you make it so?’ Cam asked.
‘Yes’ the masked figure bowed. ‘This promise I give to you…from all of us.’
‘And…’ Cam said reluctantly, ‘I know ask a lot of you…but…there is one thing I want.’
‘I am guessing it’s a child of your own’ Vergil assumed.
Cam nodded.
‘I didn’t mind so much before’ Cam explained. ‘But seeing Lucy’s children grow…and watching my brothers children grow…I now more than anything, want one of my own.’

‘Then I shall give you a child’ the masked figure said. ‘It won’t be your own flesh and blood, as you are physically unable to have any of your own, it is impossible…but I can still give you *a* child. Is that what you want?’
‘Yes’ Cam said. ‘Though only by fair means.’
The masked figure nodded once, then turned and walked away.

Weeks later, the masked figure returned to him, holding in his arms and tiny baby.
‘His mother rejected him’ Vergil explained handing the child to Cam who took the baby tentatively in his arms. ‘And this one’ Vergil continued, revealing another baby he had been concealing beneath his robes, ‘came from a world where the first girl born in every family is sacrificed to the gods.’
Cam took the second child in his arms, staring down at each in surprised.
‘This all feels so strange’ he spoke uncertainly.
‘It’s not easy being a father’ Vergil smiled. He handed Cam a book then, who took it awkwardly in his hand as he held the two babies. ‘This is a book from one of the new worlds’ Vergil explained happily. ‘It will tell you everything you need to know.’
‘Yes’ Cam grinned, suddenly feeling a little overwhelmed. ‘I’ve never lost my love of reading. I am just grateful now that my eyes can see clearly once more.’
‘Only in clockwork’ Vergil reminded.

Many years passed, and Cam over that time cared for many children who had been rejected by their parents, saved from poverty or war or destruction or had been mistreated.
Every single one of them loved him. Every single one of them adored him. And when his first children, Anna and Aiden he had named them, had children of their own, Cam helped care for them too.
‘Why do you never age?’ Anna asked her ‘father’ one day. ‘I've had my fourth child, and you are still as young and handsome as you were when I was a child myself.’
Cam sat back, holding Anna’s new born daughter in his arms, his ‘granddaughter’.
‘That is a very interesting story’ Cam beamed, gazing down at the tiny baby in his arms. ‘I could tell you if you really wanted me to…but I'm not sure if you would believe me.’

Anna and Aidan lived long and prosperous lives, both dying of old age a long time later. Their children died of old age, as did their children, and their children after that.
But Cam lived on, as young in appearance as he had always been.

Eventually the divide between ‘his children’ began to widen, as they all had children of their own, Cam became less and less a part of their lives, until Cam one day decided to make his way alone in the world, having fallen in love and married many times over.
All the woman he had loved had died, and so Cam chose another life.

For many hundreds of years, he travels to different worlds, learning of other lives and worlds, learning many different languages and traditions.
He was very alone, and as the ages stretched on, he began to feel deep loneliness eating away at him from the inside.
His final years were spent living as one of the eight ‘gods’ as they were called, having at last taken up their offer.
Whatever they really were, he didn’t know.
‘I suppose it doesn’t matter’ he said to himself one day, standing upon the landscape of Lacklustre Paradise, looking on at a world that never changed. ‘Nothing matters anymore.’

The years stretched on, and one day, Cam decided to approach one of the other masked figures.
‘Are you sure you want this?’ the masked figure asked him. ‘This is a final choice after all.’
‘I have lived a long and happy life’ Cam smiled at him. ‘Many times over. But now…I've grown tired of the way things are. I've lived for far too long…even Vergil is dead now. I did truly love him.’ He smiled again, a genuine smile of true happiness and contentment.
‘Maybe’ Cam said, ‘the afterlife is just another life…like this one……maybe…I will see my brother Luke again…and Lucy… or maybe there is nothing at all’ he shrugged. ‘In the end it doesn’t matter.’
The hooded figure smiled behind his crows mask.
‘You’ve not forgotten about them then’ he said. ‘Your brother and your lover, your childhood sweetheart. Even after all these many many years.’
‘No’ Cam beamed. ‘I could never. Not if I lived until the end of time. I will never forget their faces…. I will never forget how happy they’ve made me.’
The hooded figure bowed his head slowly.
‘Very well’ he said. ‘If that is your wish.’
‘Goodbye’ Cam uttered smiling.

The masked figure touched a hand to Cam's temple, and Cam closed his eyes.
He fell forwards then; his body caught by the masked figure, he was now only an empty shell.

Cam was dead.
His spirit and life, everything that had made him what he was, all the knowledge and experience and joys and memories he had possessed…was gone forever. He was now nothing, he didn't exist, and his soul, if such a thing ever existed, may perhaps have passed onto the afterlife.
If such a thing even existed at all.
And in time, all the people Cam had ever met that still lived, would forget about him. They would die. And in time, anything that had ever existed of Cam, memories of him, his influence on the world, on all the worlds he had ever lived in, would be gone. Until there was nothing left. Until he ceased to exist in every possible sense. Until it was as if he had never existed at all.
As was life.
For everyone that ever lived and will ever live.

'And one day' said the masked figure, staring out onto the dead and still and unchanging world that was their home, 'Lacklustre Paradise itself will be gone, as will everything that ever lived ever…until there is only nothing...'
The masked figure bowed his head with a smile.
'Nothing lives forever' he uttered, 'and in the end…*everything* dies.'

End of The WeatherMaker: Prince of Light

A new story begins in The WeatherMaker: Hearts Desire